MOURNING AND MELANCHOLY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON CHRISTOPHER OKIGBO AND DAMBUDZO MARECHERA

AHMET SAIT AKCAY/AKCAHM001

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

2020

2020 AHMET SAIT AKCAY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Harry Garuba for his dedicated support and guidance throughout my studies.
I also wish to thank Dr. Mandisa Haarhoff for carefully reading the final draft of the manuscript and providing me with useful comments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

MOURNING AND MELANCHOLY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON CHRISTOPHER OKIGBO AND DAMBUDZO MARECHERA

By

AHMET SAIT AKCAY/AKCAHM001

FEBRUARY 2020

Supervisor: Prof. Harry Garuba
Major: AFRICAN STUDIES

ABSTRACT

This study explores the modernist subjectivity in Africa by revisiting two major poets, Christopher Okigbo and Dambudzo Marechera. It argues that the modernist self is created in the form of melancholy and mourning. The main question is to see how the African modernist subjectivity is constructed through poetry. As subjects of colonialism, both Okigbo and Marechera sought to establish new links combining them with the mainstream Euromodernist movement along with their own spiritual roots. In the sense of the construction of a modernist self, the main predicament they have to challenge is the Western knowledge system which infiltrated into mindsets through colonial dominion. Thus, Okigbo and Marechera enact a certain type of positionality strategy to claim their own poetic utterance. By invoking natural and spiritual images the poets demonstrate their affiliation to their roots. The process of mourning, here, becomes a passage through which the poets claim their strong allegiances to their roots. The sense of absence leads the poets to

mourn their remote past or culture. The poets' relation with the past determines the dynamics of subjectivity. The idea of the past is so tempting and tantalising in many ways.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Background

In this thesis, I will attempt to discuss the modernist poetry in Africa by revisiting two major poets, Christopher Okigbo and Dambudzo Marechera. I intend to look at the ways 'modernist' applies to the poetry of both to provide a debate along with their poetic and intellectual engagement. My main question is to see how the African modernist subjectivity is constructed through the poetry. In the case of Okigbo and Marechera, I argue that the modernist self is created in the form of melancholy and mourning. The poetic imagery in the poetry of both poets seems strongly embedded in abstractions and dichotomies. Both melancholy and mourning play a crucial role in constructing the self as an autonomous entity.

Referring to the traumatic past of African people, postcolonial thinker and novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has drawn on the lack of mourning in postcolonial Africa, arguing, "post-colonial Africa has never properly mourned this trauma on its own continent as well as its diasporic communities in the Caribbean and America"(Ngūgī, 2009).

In this regard, I think the entire body of postcolonial African poetry might be considered a rite of mourning the past. Since grieving is the only way to rationalize the loss to maintain a living, I think, the literary works might render such service of mourning on behalf of society.

For instance, the Kenyan poet Kamoji Wachira in his epic poem *Thagana Therera*, laments for those who fought for independence and have not been buried properly.

> Why do these monstrous curses rain upon us?
> Were some first-borns' after-birth left to wild beasts?
> Is there an unpaid debt the founder and his
> progeny left to our ancestors—
> ...
> For those countless dead never yet mourned
> Killed at war defending your lands, mighty
> river... (quoted in Ngũgĩ, 2009: 60-61).

This poem sums up the traumatic situation that engulfed the continent although it addresses the Kenyan Independence war against the British forces.

Had the peoples of Africa properly mourned the dead, their loss might have been healed straightforwardly. The mourning of the dead is an imperative for survival and wellbeing.

In modernist poetry, death is not just a psychical death, it is also an abstract form of 'loss' such as the loss of indigenous culture and spirituality due to colonial domination.

In Igbo mythology, it is believed that the burial is all-important to see off a deceased to the world of the spirits, that "without decent burial rites, the spirit of the dead roam about helplessly" (Onu, 2018: 72).

Okigbo's preference for entitling most of his poems "elegies" or "laments" would demonstrate the poet's inclination towards the mourning of loss or death. Marechera's whole collection would be read as a call for mourning the past. As the past is tempting for both poets, the only way to access the past is to get rid of consistent images of haunting. Both Okigbo and Marechera seem to have a great deal of trouble to counter the burden of the past.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although elegy has a long history of being perceived as one of the oldest poetic genres, the elegiac form has been rejuvenated through modernist poetry. In his acclaimed book *Poetry of Mourning,* Jahan Ramazani argues that Modern poets reanimate the elegy by not simply "adopting its conventions: instead, they violate its norms and transgress its limits" (Ramazani, 1994: 1). He suggests that modern elegy becomes as "anti-elegiac, anti-consolatory, anti-encomiastic, anti-romantic and anti-Victorian, anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary" (Ramazani, 1994: 2).

Ramazani's formula does not only invite us to read modernist poetry via mourning but also suggests that mourning somehow characterizes the modernist poetic vision.

Obi Nwakanma, a Nigerian poet and author of *Thirsting for Sunlight: Christopher Okigbo*, considers Okigbo as "the symbol of a vast epochal moment in African post-colonial history, the symbol of a lost innocence" (Nwakanma, 2014) Nwakanma has also drawn attention to how the question of mourning becomes a constructive element in Okigbo and his generation:

> If you read Achebe, if you read Okigbo, if you read all of them in that period, they were basically mourning the loss of an irrecoverable past, because it did seem that whatever modernity touched, whatever colonialism touched, it basically absorbed. They recognized that. They attempted to be a kind of witness, and perhaps, in this witnessing, recover that world. And so Okigbo mentions the spiritual loss both in his poetry and, in fact, in his life. As he always said, he was supposed to be the inheritor, the priest of the family shrine to Idoto, to whom he dedicates his quest (Nwakanma, 2014).

In his article *Menippean Marechera*, renowned postcolonial critic Bill Ashcroft considers Marechera's writing as "Menippean" while reading his novels. Seeing Marechera's work through "the Menippean excess of his writing" (86), Ashcroft tries to show how the poet creates an autonomous self in a melancholic and exuberant way. This study

examines the poetry of Marechera and Okigbo to locate the construction of a modernist subjectivity in poetry through the functions of mourning and melancholia. By undertaking a close reading of selected poems of both, I intend to find out how mourning and melancholy became the constituent elements of modernist poetry in Africa. I will work on the interconnections mainly between two different types of spaces, dichotomies – spirituality and religion, the past and present, the colonial and the post-colonial.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective is to look at how Okigbo and Marechera construct a modernist subjectivity in the form of melancholia and mourning. To achieve this, I must pursue the following sub-objectives:

First, to examine the positionality that the poets adopt in constituting a modernist subjectivity through their lived experiences; second, to find out the roles of the past and present in their perception; and third, to examine how the poets transform reality in the colonial and postcolonial register.

1.4 Research Questions

My main question is how do Okigbo and Marechera construct a modernist subjectivity in their poetry through the form of melancholia and mourning. The following sub-questions will be addressed in the corpus of the study: How do both poets constitute a modernist subjectivity through their lived experiences? How does the idea of past and present play out in making modernist subjectivity? How do the poets position themselves amid the colonial and postcolonial registers?

1.5 Theoretical Background

In his 1917 essay, *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud addresses phenomena of mourning and melancholia. He compares the similarities and differences between the usual process of grieving or mourning and the more intense,

painful, and pathological form of mourning, which is melancholia. He argues that both are "reactions to the loss of a loved person or to the loss of some abstraction" (243).

Freud makes a distinction between melancholia and mourning. When the object of loss is not identified, this situation creates melancholia. "This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (245).

He mentions that melancholia creates a deep ambivalence in response to the loved object. The lost object is both loved and hated: "Countless separate struggles are carried on over the object in which love and hate contend with each other" (Freud, 256). In mourning "there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious," but melancholia might involve "an object loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" (245). While mourning is typically a reaction to a specific loss, often due to a death, melancholia may be a result of a less specific sense of loss, including a sense of fragmentation from having been "slighted, neglected, or disappointed" many times (251).

Finally, the pain associated with mourning ends, but the pain of melancholia continues endlessly. Freud's framework of both phenomena would help me locate the poetic reactions to the world. Modernist responses to the world in the poetry seems to be both melancholic and mourning.

Since the past is not a sense of purity or pure essence for African people, one should look at transformation of the traumatic character of the past into present.

Dominick LaCapra in his very insightful article, "Trauma, Absence and Loss" makes distinction between loss and absence: "When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working

through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted" (698).

He further notes that the conflation of absence and loss might lead to traumatic and post traumatic situations that "create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling. The very conflation attests to the way one remains possessed or haunted by the past, whose ghosts and shrouds resist distinctions (such as that between absence and loss)" (LaCapra, 699).

1.6 Methodological Framework

It is well known to academics in literary and cultural studies that every text produces its historical and cultural meaning in a discursive way. This study will proceed to examine cultural codes and references as they unfold throughout the structure of poetry in its allegories, episodes and tropes.

My departure point is "critical difference", a term developed through Derrida's key term "difference" by Barbara Johnson. Derrida, in his article entitled *La differance,* mentions the integration of the temporal and spatial dimensions of the term "difference".

Johnson's reading method focuses on the concept of critical difference and problematizes the structure of difference or differences emerging from the text. This reading method targets the repressed differences in the entire text, grounded on illusions that are made of binary oppositions. Termed as deconstructive reading, this method cannot be considered as the destruction of binaries; nonetheless, it traces the differences constructed through oppositions.

Along with Johnson, I would also use Freud's framework to conceptualize the function of melancholy and mourning in the making of the modernist self/subjectivity.

Subjectivity functions as performance. I would like to shed light on the relationship between subjectivity and performance. Like performativity, subjectivity consists of sets of norms and conventions; yet, unlike performativity, or at least in its general usage so far, subjectivity encompasses experiences as well as verbal articulateness.

I hope to apply the deconstructive method first to find out the differences, and then to clarify the shifting landscape that enables us to see how the past switches to the present, or the present to the past.

1.7 The Rationale of the Study

Both Okigbo and Marechera were able to document troubling links between the past and the present, which created a space to contest, reinvent and renounce. Both poets reject being labelled African writers and insist on being simply called writers.

Marechera is hardly remembered and acknowledged as a poet yet he launched a unique modernist style in poetry that is highly contested. Marechera's, and Okigbo's especially, style has a direct link to both European and African modernist tradition. Both poets create an astute lyrical intimacy in separate ways. In Marechera, intimacy springs not only from loneliness but also from an artistic revolutionary approach.

Reading Marechera and Okigbo is like entering a sequence of unsettling, multi-layered imagery that becomes tinted with a sense of discomfort, where images are transferred to lucid and somehow uncontrolled forms of disturbance. Both have shown their willingness to channel their anger towards a form of power embedded in the colonial and postcolonial periods, yet the corrosive tone of their poems suggests an ambitious voice for violence that questions the connections between the two.

1.8 Literature Review on Okigbo and Marechera

Both Okigbo and Marechera remain the most enigmatic figures in African literature. They are unique in many ways and their short-lived careers left a huge impact on African literature.

Okigbo was part of the first generation of modernist African poetry. Along with Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Kofi Awoonor, and Dennis Brutus are well-known poets who made their first appearances in literary journals like *Black Orpheus* and *Transition* during the late 1950's and 1960's. Okigbo became a very established poet, employing imagery drawn from his vast knowledge and understanding of classical and western literature in addition to his own spiritual imagination based on Igbo and Yoruba cosmology.

Most critics tend to look at Okigbo's poetry through influences, even though he acknowledges that he creates a form of modernist poetry based on his knowledge of world literature. His poetry creates a complicated imagery that does not allow anyone to reduce it to a single narrow path.

Gerald Moore in his article "Vision and Fulfilment", attributes Okigbo's poetic complexity to T. S. Eliot. Moore goes on to say, "Okigbo rehandles such words as laughter, dream, light, presence, voice, blood, exactly as Eliot teases out all the possible meanings of beginning, middle and end in East Coker. Both poets' fragments of catholic liturgy mixed with others from the classical world, paganism and magic" (Nwoga, 286). This point of view seems to see Okigbo's poetic vision in the shadow of Eliot.

The main obstacle for Eurocentric critics to overcome is to acknowledge African spirituality and myth. In addition to that, most of the time they fail to see the distinction between Eliot, Pound and Yeats's search for mythic invention and the African approaches to their own mythmaking as a form of lived experience. It seems very problematic to call African spirituality "paganism" which is not considered pagan in the African sense at all.

Conversely, Romanus Egudu, in his article "Defence of Culture in the Poetry of Christopher Okigbo," reads Okigbo's poetry as a medium to fight colonial evangelism in West Africa. He epitomizes Okigbo's imagination of culture as a struggle to "revive and preserve his indigenous religion" (Egudu, 21) against Christianity.

Robert Fraser's critique of Okigbo's poetry remains outstanding in many ways. In his book, *West African Poetry*, Fraser dedicated a chapter to Okigbo's poetic vision. He looks at the poetic structure comparatively and demonstrates how the complexity of imagery works through different layers such as mythology, religion and spirituality. Of Okigbo's standing, he reminds, "Okigbo's preoccupations constitute grand themes which have obsessed poets through the ages. Of all poets dealt with in this volume Okigbo has the strongest claim to be considered a writer of permanent standing, since, though firmly grounded in the traditions and realities of the region in which he grew up, his talent was of the sort which reaches out and embraces every time and place. He also possessed to a marked degree that authentic poetic mania, the spirit which derives an individual to express himself even at the cost of his sanity, life and self-respect" (Fraser, 1984: 137).

Regarding Christopher Okigbo's poetry as "profoundly intellectual" as well as "sensual and political", literary critic Patrick Williams asserts that "Okigbo's 'writing back' is most powerfully directed to traditionalists and cultural purists, in his repeated affirmation that cultures not only can mix, but absolutely must" (qtd. in McHale, 154).

Sunday O. Anozie's structuralist study of Okigbo*, Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric* (1972), looks at literary and historical accounts that shape the form of spiritual quest through its structure. The book illuminates Okigbo's journey through its allusions and references.

Okigbo in his 1965 interview observes: "The modern African is no longer a product of an entirely indigenous culture. The modern sensibility which the modern African poet is trying to express is by its very nature

complex, it is a complex of values, some of which are indigenous, some of which are exotic, some of which are traditional, some of which are modern. Some of these values we are talking about are Christian, some are non-Christian, and I think that anybody who thinks it is possible to express consistently only one line of values, indigenous or exotic, is probably being artificial (Duerden & Pieterse 1972:144)" (qtd. in Okafor, 156).

As Annemarie Heywood said, "Any discussion of Okigbo's poetry leads into questions about "meaning"; most Okigbo criticism ends up as exegesis" (207).

Critics like Emmanuel Ngara, Chinweizu et al., and Chidi Amuta tend to conceptualize Okigbo's poetry within a traditional landscape, seeing a transformation of his poetry from elitism to realism.

Chinweizu et al. in his controversial critique, "Prodigals, Come Home", accused modernists of imitating modernist sensibilities by leaving the African tradition. He tries to demonize modernist African poets, "those who deny African traditions-and traditional Africa-a controlling place in their consciousness have no alternative but to formulate African Modernity in Western Bourgeois terms" (Chinweizu, 181). He differs Okigbo as the one who learnt his lessons from his sins. He even goes further to advice:

> Let them declare themselves for what they are-modernists of the West, not modernist of the Africa. Let them acknowledge what they are and cease and desist from influencing and advising us and our prosperity in the wrong directions. If and when, like Okigbo, they return home, we shall gladly celebrate their homecoming. For we cannot reject our prodigals if they come home (183).

Reading his poetry through T. S. Eliot's influences, Ngara does acknowledge the poet's engagement with Euromodernists as it was considered "art for art's sake" (Ngara, 1990:47), but hails Okigbo's homecoming and commitment to his society as a promising "great revolutionary poet".

For Marxist critics, a decade of poet's writing life is divided into two parts; early Okigbo, and late Okigbo. Even though Okigbo himself mentions and somehow names specific social events for inspiration, such social realist critics fail to read imagery through their mimetic perspective. Despite Okigbo's highly modernist elitist style, Amuta considers him as a poet of liberation along with Dennis Brutus, Christopher Caudwell, Louis Aragon and Maxim Gorky (Amuta, 1989:177).

Brushing off such criticism of imitation in Okigbo's poetry, Heywood treats Okigbo's language as "eloquent yet uncommunicative, concrete yet not natural, private yet impersonal" (216). Regarding various elements in Okigbo's poetry, she goes on to argue, "I suggest that these foreign bodies in the poetic tissue are talismans embodying the charisma of Okigbo's original experience of them, as well as the power carried over from their original context" (216).

In his interview with Robert Serumaga in July 1965, Okigbo reflects on poetic imagination. I think, Okigbo's response to those who trace the western influences on his poetry is quite telling:

> I think that I've been influenced by various literatures and cultures, right from Classical times to the present day, in English, Latin, Greek and a little French, a little Spanish, but I think that in fact the question of influence is very complicated thing. One reads something and says, this might have been influenced by one person. It's often difficult to pin down an influence to a particular source. If those sources have become assimilated into the subject and have come together to form an integral whole it is very difficult to sort the out-to know where the Babylonian influence ends, and where, if you like, the modern influence starts (qtd. in Nwoga, 1984:247).

On the other hand, critics like Jahan Ramazani and Harry Garuba are looking at postcolonial poetry through interconnections between different understandings and applications of modernism in poetry. On Okigbo's contribution to modernist poetry, Garuba credits Okigbo with creating a global template in the context of Africa:

> When Okigbo takes his traditional initiation rites, naming of a child in Igbo culture, for instance, he wants not just to simply show us

> how the Igbo culture is, but to say this is a way of welcoming a child into the world that resonances across cultures. He places it on, if you like, a global template of other kind of myths of that sort of birth and rebirth. His first poems, "Havensgate," he calls an Easter Sequence, although it is very much based on an Igbo epistemology (Akcay, 2019).

Ramazani, in his book *A Transnational Poetics*, sees Derek Walcott and Christopher Okigbo as modernist poets like canonical modernists such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound by creating cross-cultural links in Anglophone literature.

Ironically, the lack of scholarly attention to Marechera's poetry in modernist studies has persisted alongside growing interests in his novels. His poetry has not even been considered as part of modernist African poetry. His poetry is typically seen as revolutionary but distinct from modernism. His poetry and prose, although they both present an amalgam of modernist melancholia and mourning, are hardly associated. One should remember that the decade of the Liberation war in Zimbabwe, 1970–79, created the Liberation-war poets like Christopher Magadza, Freedom Nyamubaya and Thomas Bvuma. Even Marechera does not show any influence of such movement, though his critics attempt to relate him to liberation poetry.

In a recent study on Zimbabwean poetry, Alfred Musvoto regards Marechera as "non-conformist" and "anarchic," stating that "the true self for Marechera, as for other anarchists is not the empirical one that is mediated upon by outside forces such as society's laws and accepted conventions" (Musvoto, 2010: 138). Musvoto also acknowledges the lack of criticism on Marechera: "Such critics fail to acknowledge the depth of the diversity and often conflicting and ever-shifting poetic voices that Marechera speaks with, and the eclecticism that characterizes his poetic vision" (Musvoto, 127).

Marechera is aware of poetic diction, the combination of reality and its objective correlative:

> Poetry is an attempt to put into words what is inside a person emotionally, intellectually, imaginatively. The poet's job is to find the equivalent, the verbal correlative of a particular feeling. This idea is from T. S. Eliot. The only difficulty is that there are no words for what you are feeling. When one has got into a lot of mindwork and this is especially the case with poetry you get into a state where poetry becomes pure thought, where there is no clear difference between philosophy and poetry. It is like a retreat from physical reality, an entry into a realm where the human being ceases to be and your soul takes over. Poetry becomes an attempt by the individual to become invisible, but with a kind of invisibility which illuminates things from within as well as from without. That sort of poetry you can't really find in Africa and if you do it is always denounced as bourgeois (209).

Eddie Tay speaking of the poetic vision of Marechera, argues: "Poetic creation for Marechera occurs in the absence of the self, society, agenda, politics, ideology, and even public influences. When he invokes other poets, he is not invoking them as his influences, but encounters out of which there is no affinity. Marechera plunders Rilke's poem so as to emerge with his own" (Tay, 177). Tay even considers Marechera as a postmodernist through the ways he adopts T. S. Eliot's poetic vision.

In his article "The Outsider Within: Marginality as Symptom in Marechera's "Throne of Bayonets," Dirk Klopper argues how the marginality of Marechera's poetry works through the strategy of mimicry in terms of identity. He draws on the psychic side of his poetry. "Marechera's text functions as the unconscious of the social, revealing that which the official ideology has repressed. But it is equally the case that the social constitutes the unconscious of the text. The text is therefore doubly articulated, dialectically inscribed as other than itself (130).

T. O. McLoughlin, in his essay "Resistance and Affirmation: Marechera's 'My Arms Vanished Mountains'," tends to connect the poet to the poetry of liberation acknowledging his artistic way to be an independent voice. He goes on to assert, "what often goes unnoticed is that Marechera writes a resistance poetry of an unusual kind. ... in this sense Marechera's is a poetry of the oppressed, though not in the narrow political sense of

various collectives such as class or gender. The voice is a voice of yearning for liberation not the political liberation so often delivered in a well-established ideological discourse, but liberation of individual person from silence (133).

1.9 Chapters Breakdown

This study deals with the process of subject formation in modernist African poetry. After the introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into the following chapters.

Chapter Two illustrates the development of modernist African poetry and its engagement with postcolonialism and Euromodernism.

Chapter Three deals with the question of positionality of the poetic self through mourning. It focuses on how mourning is shaped in the form of elegy. Mourning functions inside the poetry as lamentations of nature and spirituality.

Chapter Four investigates the dilemma of the past and present in the form of mourning and melancholia. The loss and absence create melancholic mourning when the poets fail to address the question of the past.

CHAPTER TWO
MODERNIST AFRICAN POETRY

2.1 Make the African past ever-present

Modernism is cultural, literal, and art movement that disassociates itself from social life as well as traditional form and genres. Emerging in England from 1914 onward, the movement came forth after several social and historical changes during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, including the First World War and its aftermath.

The period in which modernist poetry appeared to flourish came after historical, social and scientific developments. In order to grasp the notion of modernism, one should have a brief look at the changes in the formation of the new society.

Modernists find the traditional forms inadequate to respond to the new changes taking place in society. Realism promised that art functions as a mirror to the society, which works in harmony with nature like a clock, but this idea became illusionary due to drastic changes in the second half of the eighteenth century that prompted a different way of understanding literature.

Europe had gone through radical changes such as the Industrial Revolution, scientific and social developments, and the First World War before the movement comes forth.

The arrival of new terms such as “unconscious” and “stream of consciousness”, which were coined by Sigmund Freud and William James respectively led to a drastic change in mind-sets and thereafter in art and literature as well. The realization of the self and disconnectedness created a sense of art for art's sake, leading to the development of an autonomous subject of new artistic and poetic form.

As Peter Faulkner puts it, the sense of complexity becomes a “fundamental recognition” for those who are aware of this complexity and

"incorporated into their works a wide-ranging understanding of life" (14-15).

"Modernist literature" is summed up in Peter Childs' *Modernist Literature* as "self-consciously experimental and formally complex, seeing language as a substance and identity as rooted in cultural dislocation" (4). In modernism, the idea of art is no longer a reflection of outside or life or nature; it refers to a unique way of self-experience that appeals to the artists. Oscar Wilde considers art as life and both are not interchangeable since he declared a motto for modernists in his 1889 seminal essay entitled The Decay of Dying, "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life."

Eliot speaks of modern poetry as a passage between complexity and language:

> We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning (Eliot, 1951:259).

It is more 'refinement of sensibility' to be located in the self. He wrote in *The Metaphysical Poets* in 1921:

> When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes (117).

2.2. Postcolonial Modernism

Postcolonialism and modernism have been debated together and in conjunction since the late 1980s (Gilbert, 1991). The postcolonial

response to modernism appeared to be reassessment of modernism in the postcolonial context when Edward Said engaged Yeats's poetry and differentiated his role in "Irishness" to challenge the empire discourse. The second challenge on modernism and postcolonial theory came from Fredric Jameson. Jameson considered the whole third world literature as an allegory of nation, which has also been reacted to in many ways. The works of Joyce and Yeats, two founding fathers of modernist literature, and even Samuel Beckett's texts, engendered a debate on the alternative concepts of modernism and transformation of language to other nations in the world. The experimental style of Irish modernist writers has also been considered as a "response to the imperatives of cultural decolonization" and even Ulysses was taken as "inaugurating postcolonial modernism" (Moore-Gilbert, 553).

Bart Moore-Gilbert, in his article "Postcolonial Modernism", suggests that "As one might infer from its insistence on the material relations governing appropriations from non-Western cultures, post colonialism has stirred debate about the degree to which Anglo-American modernism, in particular, should be understood as a form of colonial discourse which reinforces dominant forms of thinking about race and empire during the period (554). He cites Chinua Achebe's most celebrated essay on Conrad as one of the effective critiques of the western imposition over Africa. The main question, as posed by Moore-Gilbert, is whether modernism in Africa was an outcome of colonial encounters. To answer this question properly, one must engage with the arrival of modernity on African soil and its impact thereafter.

Before that, I would like to highlight the different registers of modernism. Postcolonial critics like Bill Ashcroft and John Salter consider high modernist discourse as an extension of metropolitan hegemonic power: "The high cultural discourse of modernism, with its imposition of a set of largely uncontested parameters upon a non-European cultural reality, may be seen to be metonymic of the operation of imperial domination" (Booth and Rigby 200:293) (quoted in Moore-Gilbert, 554).

I think Jed Esty's remarks on the distinction between high and late modernism should be considered to understand the points of Ashcroft and Salter:

> High modernism was more historically engaged with the uncut facts of ceaseless modernization but in a socially limited way, whereas late modernism is more socially and anthropologically engaged but has a more limited (i.e. national and organicist) concept of history (53).

In his book *Modernist Papers*, Jameson sheds light on the transformation between the empire and colonies, mentioning that the main obstacles remain in-betweenness. Referring to modernist experimentalism, he goes on to say:

> These are not, in this period, to be found in what will come to be called the Third World, or in the colonies: there the face of imperialism is brute force, naked power, open exploitation; but there also the mapping of the imperialist world system remains structurally incomplete, for the colonial subject will be unable to register the peculiar transformations of First World or metropolitan life which accompany the imperial relationship (164).

The question of modernity might be taken as part of colonization as the former foregrounded the latter. For Achille Mbembe, "on a rhetorical level, colonization is the daughter of the Enlightenment. As such, colonial rule is supposed to operate as a regulating mechanism that ultimately leads to the triumph of "universal reason" (Mbembe, 2002, 634)

Mbembe creates a direct link between colonization and modernity, arguing: "Like Islam and Christianity, colonization is a universalizing project. Its ultimate aim is to inscribe the colonized in the space of modernity" (634).

One should also not forget that the discourse of modernity in Africa is very much concomitant of the process of colonization. As Harry Garuba's and Graham Huggan's remarks point out, colonization and modernity go hand in hand in terms of cartographic power. As Garuba puts it, "colonialism as regime of power" functions through "spatiality and subjectivity: spaces to capture, subjects to control" (Garuba, 2002: 87).

To Garuba, colonial mapping, a process which is based on Cartesian logic, generates the need to map, name and describe the world in certain terms. And the colonial mapping works through the enlightenment paradigm which subordinates the world to a set of representations designed by the Europeans (88).

Huggan points out that the mimesis has consistently provided a means of promoting and reinforcing the stability of Western culture because "mimesis" has been used as part of colonial discourse and has cemented the representation of reality, that of the Western (116).

Still, one has to ask, echoing Raymond Williams' provocation, 'When was the modernity in Africa?'

For Simon Gikandi, modernity starts with the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, which marks a tragic encounter between Europe and Africa. According to him, modernity penetrated the fabric of local communities by imposing modernization projects:

> … the colonial process presented an interpretative enigma: colonial culture had transformed many African societies through voluntary and enforced modernization, but as many observers the African scene were quick to note, this process did not seem to penetrate too deeply into the fabric of local communities. Ostensibly, colonialism touched every aspect of social and political life on the continent, but its impact also seemed to be superficial because, in spite of the predominance and preponderance of colonial modernity, so called traditional society seemed to function as if the colonial event was a mere interruption in the longue duree of African history (Gikandi, 2004:382).

Gikandi argues that colonialism is located at the heart of modernity; therefore, modern African literature cannot be separated from the colonial process but can be produced through "the simultaneous existence of a modern and traditional world" (382).

Following up these arguments, Ato Quayson draws on two other factors besides colonialism: "processes of nation state formation and the

constitutive ambiguity of being forced for certain significant purposes to operate in a colonial language both during and after empire" (825). Quayson believes that these three factors make up African modernism. Before going into detail on the question of African modernism, I would like to mention a historical account of the application of modernity in colonial Africa. The debate over "colonial modernity" first came forth when the London-based International Institute of African Cultures and Languages initiated its plan for the development of Africa, the 'Five-Year Plan of Research', in 1932 (Probst, Deutsch, Schmidt, 2002, 5). We can trace the imposition of modernity in the agenda which owed its concepts to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski as follows:

> The fundamental problem arising from the permeation of African life by the ideas and economic forces that are entering the continent may bring about its complete disintegration, the results of which must be calamitous for the individuals who compose it and at the same time render it impossible to achieve an orderly evolution of the community. It is proposed, therefore, that the inquires fostered by the Institute should be directed towards bringing about a better understanding of the factors of social cohesion in African society, the ways in which these are being affected by the news influences, tendencies towards new groupings and formation of new social bonds and forms of co-operation between African societies and western civilization (Probst, Deutsch, Schmidt, 2002: 5).

This passage highlights an integral mechanism created between the metropole and its colonies, and it shows how transformation and adaption of cultures were processed from the centre.

Gikandi makes far-reaching arguments about the centrality of modernism in postcolonial literature, claiming, "without modernism, postcolonial literature as we know it would perhaps not exist" (Gikandi, 2006: 421). Again, Gikandi also considers postcolonial literary imagination as an irony of imitation through the high European modernism:

> The great irony of the history of postcolonial literatures was the emulation of high modernists, such as Eliot and Yeats, as formal models. This emulation was explicit, as the poetry of Rubadiri and Christopher Okigbo illustrates, but it could also be indirect and

> epigraphic, as in Chinua Achebe's derivation of a title and epigraph from Yeat's "Second Coming" for Things Fall Apart, and from "The Journey of the Magi" in No Longer at Ease. … Indeed, it is my contention that it was primarily—I am tempted to say solely—in the language and structure of modernism that a postcolonial experience came to be articulated and imagined in literary form (420).

These arguments lead us to several questions of location, locality and centrality, and how centrality is articulated and transmitted through literary forms.

Modernist poetry is often characterized by Pound's slogan 'Make it new' leading the charge for the movement, which is also the title of one his books. To illustrate the notion, in Peter Howarth's words, Pound was trying to "make the past ever-new, rather than leaving it behind, for he thought 'all ages are contemporaneous' in poetry" (9).

This slogan has been taken into consideration by modern African poets who challenge the discursive system of modernity and replace it with their own reality through their imagination.

While modernist poetry owes much to Ezra Pound's Imagism of the early twentieth century, African modernist poetry is indebted to Euromodernist's construction of "the self". Conjured by Pound, Imagism and its role in modern poetry cannot be properly appreciated without mentioning the poet's definition of 'image'. "An image", Pound writes, "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". As Joseph Frank noted in his influential 1945 essay on modernism, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts", "an image is defined not as a pictorial reproduction, but as unification of disparate ideas and emotions into complex presented spatially in an instant of time" (226).

The function of modern poetry, according to Frank, is to "ask its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (230).

2.3 Modernist African Poetry

The years in which the first generation of modernist poets made their appearance as leading African poets also coincided with the years in which many African countries acquired political independence after five hundred years of colonial occupation.

Where most literary scholars attribute complexity, experimentalism, and innovation to Euromodernist poetry, the terms deployed to describe modern African poetry tend to focus on tradition, myths, authenticity and spirituality. Such criticism of modernist African poetry fails to combine various traditions of poetry in the African context.

Although African modernism originated in a literary environment rather than a political one, it is not to say that it has no relation to politics. For most of the modernist poets, especially those based in West Africa, commitment to modernism was purely aesthetics.

Since their inception, literary journals *Black Orpheus* and *Transition* have become a crucial part of modernist poetry in Africa. The poems of the first generation of modernist African poets appeared in these journals.

Dan Izevbaye attributes the rise of African modernist poetry to African elitist and middle classes' engagement in cultural and literary public spheres:

> African indigenous cultural events and material products were brought to the university or its centres as cultural exhibits or processed for assimilation into the new cultural direction that was being shaped through the discourse of this new middle class. Even when there was a deliberate attempt to break the influence of the university on the new middle class, as in the creation of the Mbari Society of writers and artists at Ibadan, the influence of the university was still present, at least in the background of members and the nature of its discourses (13).

Spirituality and ritual form become partly a generic form of modernist African poetry, especially that which springs from Nigeria and Ghana. It requires a very specific register of modernism which one might call

'animistic modernism,' in some ways, to account for African innovative and imaginative processes.

Any reference to modernist African poetry would lead us to postcolonial African poetry. Therefore, there cannot be any separation between the two in terms of form and content since "African poetry operates at the center of the postcolonial aura" (Okunoye, 31, 2017).

As Jahan Ramazani points out, Euromodernism opened a space for non-Western poets to "explore their hybrid culture and postcolonial experience" (Ramazani, 2006: 446).

Ramazani's term, "modernist bricolage" as a formula to bridge the two is quite telling, he describes it as "the synthetic use in early twentieth-century poetry of diverse cultural materials ready to hand—has helped postcolonial poets encode aesthetically the intersections among mul- tiple cultural vectors" (448).

In contrast to the claims of Ashcroft and Salter, Ramazani does not consider the modernist topos of self-alienation as metonymic of imperial domination (448). For him, it rather provides a space to contest imperialistic images. He illustrates the way postcolonial poets refashion the difference and hybridity:

> Since the postcolonial writer inhabits the multiple cultural worlds forcibly conjoined by empire, hybridity—the knotting together of countless already knotted together indigenous and imposed languages, images, and genres—is not an aspect but the basic fabric the postcolonial poems. In redeploying modernism across these differences, postcolonial poets have had to refashion it for resisting local and imperial monisms, for articulating a cross-culturalism still more plural and polyphonic than Euromodernism. They have reshaped it through indigenous genres and vocabularies, have recentered it in non-Western landscapes and mythologies, and have often inverted its radical and cultural politics (Ramazani, 449).

Seeing modern African poetry as a medley of indigenous oral tradition and colonial culture, Oyeniyi Okunoye suggests that "hybridity is not evident in the formal constitution of poetic texts but it also manifests itself in the crisis of identity for westernized Africans of various generations" (33).

Calling the first generation of West African modernist poetry "the modernist-nationalist," Garuba, in his article "The Unbearable Lightness of Being: Re-Figuring Trends in Recent Nigerian Poetry", argues:

> Adopting the modernistic technique of the multi-layered narrative, these writers basically re-wrote this idiom not only introduction of what, for the moment, we may call authentically material at the level of content but also at the level of technique, they reworked it away from the disabling politics of time encoded in modernism. As Johannes Fabian so convincingly argues in Time and the Other, in terms of the linear calibrations of modernist time, the Other was always located downstream, as it were, at the evolutionary beginnings, outside of the modern present. If the model of the modernist aesthetics was archaeological, invoking layers of a buried past, the aspiration of the modernist-nationalist poets was somewhat different; their model different image - was more like the hologram. Instead of depth emphasized angles of vision, ways of seeing" (Garuba, 2005:58).

Christopher Butler draws on a variety of reflections of myth in modernist literature, "The modernist use of myth in creative work is an amalgam of various conflicting discourses, all of which have their own interesting relations to the culture in which the artist works" (Butler, 46).
The use of myth also becomes a constructive element in style when Eliot treats Ulysses as a sequence of a mythic notion of time. Lara Vetter delineates this transformation of religion to a sense of spirituality:

> "For most modernist poets, then, God was not dead, despite the anxious proclamations of his demise at the fin de siècle. But conceptions of divinity were in flux, and traditional religious rituals and practices were on the wane. Belief in another world – in the authenticity of spiritual existence – persisted well into the twentieth century, even if this conviction lacked the certitude it enjoyed in previous centuries" (104).

Tanure Ojaide's *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa* (1996) also maps the uniqueness of the African poetic imagination which is differentiated from Euromodernist aesthetics:

> Modern African poetic aesthetics are unique in possessing a repertory of authentic African features. This authenticity manifests itself in the use of

> concrete images derived from the fauna and flora, proverbs, indigenous rhythms, verbal tropes, and concepts of space and time to establish a poetic form. Besides (and unlike in the West), content is more important than form and images do not aim to reflect the senses. Content is not perceived by poet and audience as extra-literary. The mere fact that foreign languages are used could occasionally create discord in discourse but modem African poetry attempts to reflect indigenous rhythms. In fact, an authentic African world forms the backdrop of modem African poetry (30).

Harry Garuba shows the very specific characteristic of postcolonial poetry of the landscape as a challenge to the imperial eyes:

> Since colonization is first and foremost about territorial and epistemological dispossession, postcolonial poetry of the landscape and the environment also had to strive to reverse this by reclaiming cognitive and epistemological ownership of the land. The restoration and repossession took a racial turn in some of the poetry such as in the poems of Negritude writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire; in others, often in the anglophone poetry from Africa, it was more limited to a national scale of freedom and the quest for new beginnings (Garuba, 2017:210).

In this regard, "territorial and epistemological dispossession" determines the form of poetic understanding in post-colonial African literature. What makes African modernist poetry significant is truly based on the poets' approach.

That is why modernist African poets are made to think of themselves through pastoral and rural oeuvre. Even though most of them lived at the heart of cities, they still did not associate with metropole culture, for living under colonial domination estranged the subjects from such imagination. They were alienated from the culture of cities, and the sense of city life did not accommodate the feeling of home.. Thus, since the cities are representative of the metropole, the notion of living inside the city seems to be absent from the new formation of modernist subjects of Africa.

To sum up, modernist African poetry cannot be considered as just an adaptation of the Euromodernist poetry but rather it is an extension of modernist sense emerged through the poetic construction of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Yeats, in which Africans truly see themselves as agents. I think modernist African poets created a unique subjectivity that earned them a solid literary space. They consolidated their positions, in a sense, by transmitting the African experiences in a form of modernist construction. That's why African modernist poetry should be read/considered as a great contribution to modernist poetry.

CHAPTER THREE
POSITIONALITY AND MODERNIST SELF

This chapter examines the strategies that Okigbo and Marechera use to enact a modernist self through poetry. In order to reflect on their poetic vision, one should look at how they transmit their lived experiences through the colonial and postcolonial periods.

I will look at the ways in which modernist subjectivity is shaped via the act of mourning by looking at selected poems of Okigbo and Marechera. Harry Garuba, in his interview, draws on the multi-layered function of African letters and writers' strategies. He observes that "African writing was thus strategically positioned to intervene and reconfigure the dominant within the pre-existent field of textuality (Garuba, 2020, forthcoming).

African modernist poets embark on individual journeys in a quest for origin and language to position themselves as literary agents. These odysseys involve cultural, spiritual, political and religious elements in the poetry.

Since Okigbo's entire poetry deals with the practice of mourning in the form of elegies and dirge, he constitutes a template covering the issues to find his own voice. Similarly, Marechera's poems can be read as challenging the mechanism of life to demonstrate his artistic vision. Even though Marechera does not intend to write in form of elegies or laments, there are allusions and invocations of mourning.

Most critics tend to view Okigbo's poetry through the lens of the New Criticism which avoids arbitrariness and obscurity in poetry while focusing on the harmony of imagery. Since his poetic vision shows the amalgam of

differences in the form of anti-consolatory, one should look at differences embedded in the poetry.

It is worth quoting Okigbo's view from the introduction of *Labyrinths* (1965) to understand the motivation and force foregrounding the poetry:

> Every work of this kind is necessarily a cry of anguish – of the root extending its branches of coral, of corals extending their roots into each living hour; the swell of the silent sea, the great heaving dream at its highest, the thunder of splitting pods—the tears scatter, take root, the cotyledons broken, burgeons into laughter of leaf; or else rot into vital hidden roles in the nitrogen cycle. The present dream clamoured to be born a cadenced cry: silence to appease the fever of fight beyond the iron gate.

Okigbo speaks of many sources that cultivated his poetic style and vision. His deep understanding of classics and modern literature helped him generate a modernist African self. According to Garuba, by engaging world literature, Okigbo "constructs a form of worldliness in which the local is inserted into the global through the use of various strategies and techniques of enunciation" (Garuba, 2020, forthcoming).

3.1 Strategic Positionality

On his strategic positionality, Garuba argues that it is not simply an adaptation, but it foregrounds the backbone of modern African poetry (Garuba, 2020, forthcoming).

Similarly, in his essay "The African Writers Experience of European Literature", Marechera strikes a note illustrating his literary vision, "I wrote essays and tried to insult (privately) English Literature by crossing the Channel on a translation ferry to continental Europe."

He goes on to add:

> From early in my life I have viewed literature as a unique universe that has no internal divisions. I do not pigeon-hole it by race or language or nation. It is an ideal cosmos co-existing with this crude one. I had a rather grim upbringing in the ghetto and had ever since tried to deny the painful reality of concrete history. If, as it is said,

> we all have something to hide then my whole life has been an attempt to make myself the skeleton in my own cupboard (Marechera, 33).

I believe Garuba's observation on Okigbo applies to Marechera's positioning very well. One of Okigbo's earliest poems, "Song Of The Forest" (1958), which was inspired by Virgil's Tityrus, simply shows the poet's way of looking. It recalls the persona's childhood in a very retrospective way. The poet locates himself far away from home, a rural village. As "a loaf, child of the forest", persona is a "runaway":

> Me, away from home, run-
> away, must leave the borders of our
> land, fruitful fields,
> must leave our homeland.

This very short poem marks a poetic vision of Okigbo as well as the start of his long engagement with world literature. Here, the departure from homeland is a "must". More importantly, this departure signifies his long odyssey into modern poetry. Even though it depicts a pastoral environment of his own, somehow bearing a tone of lamenting the village, there is a distance between the persona and his home, which also disassociates him from his cultural landscape.

It is important to note that Okigbo's modelling of modern poetry works like a compass, with one leg fixed in traditional level operating through Igbo musical instrument *ubo,* and the other leg associated with the modern poetic vision.

Another poem, "Love Apart" enhances this view indicating 'inbetweenness':

> The moon has ascended between us
> Between two pines
> That bow to each other
> …
> And we are now shadows
> That cling to each other
> But kiss the air only.

This poem is inspired by the moon which creates an illusionary between the two. The most characteristic line that signifies Okigbo's literary and intellectual positionality within modern poetry is when Okigbo refers to himself as a "town-crier", a mourner who reflects on his own story.

> If I don't learn to shut my mouth I'll soon go to hell
> I, Okigbo, town-crier, together with my iron bell.

The last stanza of "Hurrah For Thunder" illustrates clearly that Okigbo is committed to transmitting, witnessing and reflecting his experience.
Like Okigbo, Marechera tries to witness his own country through his body. In a poem entitled "My skin is the map", the persona mourns his homeland as his skin:

> My skin is the map
> Of a country beyond thought.
> These scars results of a broken hearth
> Whose blood and muscle are the rivers
> The valleys, mountains of Lesapi.
> Do not leave me yet again on the brink
> Of sorrow –
> Dare I swim for it –
> Aspire to the quick and the peak
> Of her I desire?

By associating his body and home, the persona internalizes the sorrow of his country, and places the home country at the centre of his imagination. His concerns are well structured and mapped out. It also provides Marechera's poetic strategy and his involvement.
Mourning helps poets to rationalize their loss by establishing a new form between the self and the desired. The personas of Okigbo and Marechera perform mourning for their loss, that of the spiritual, past, pastoral or personal. The poetry functions as a process of healing from the burden of life.
For instance, Marechera's poem, "Ice to Reprieve" might be considered as a voice of the speaker's agony:

> Something in every face dismays

And instantly confounds commonsense,
Denies known doctrines, and leaves me
Clenched inside by a fearful sympathy.

The persona is hopeless, imprisoned, and lost in face of death. These lines serve as gesture to death since it is seen "from within all voices". Where the known doctrines fail to erase the self, the only way which remains as a fact is to witness the decaying.

Unlike Okigbo, Marechera recalls his childhood in very plaintive tone. In his poem, "My Time to Know", the persona mourns his childhood as it is drowned in the Lesapi River:

There is a river called Lesapi
From whose bedrock, like ghosts of weeds,
Passion's flames vainly yearn to surface,
To rise
To bolt-burst
And retire, confirmed by the sparkling-clear Air.

And this London-returned ghoul
Withdraw his live-coal tears
Into his own stone-hewn eyes.

Here, childhood drowned never to rise
No bloated floating corpse ever was seen:
Only these flameweeds on the bedrocks of a river
Known as Lesapi.

Forests and rivers are sources of memories for Okigbo and Marechera. For Okigbo, the forest was abandoned for the sake of modern life, while Marechera's childhood was buried in the Zimbabwean river which is "like ghosts of weeds" devouring memories.

The persona is a "ghoul with stone-hewn eyes". Elsewhere the same persona is called a hero of planets: "I reclaim planets by the bright-red

sword/I am hewn in stone and wood and metal as Hero" (from "I have eaten the stars").

3.2. Spirituality Through Poetic Vision

In his book *Religious Experiences and the Modernist Novel*, Pericles Lewis argues that "Modernist novels search for ways to reconstruct a sacred community in the absence of churches, thereby attempting to resolve the problem of privatization of religion" (31). This emptiness is filled with myth or spirituality which mostly involves some sort of mourning the loss. Like Ramazani, Tammy Clewell sees modernism as a repudiation of the concept of consolation proposing 'ongoing mourning' alternatively as "sustained rather than severed attachment to loss" (Clewell, 2009, 3). For Clewell, "Modernist aesthetics, engages an innovative conception of mourning; it not only reflects a shift in emphasis from the communal to the psychic dimensions of grief, but also spurns consolation and the conventional aim of closure" (2).

In this regard, most of Okigbo and Marechera's poems, even though not classified as elegies, are subject to mourning. Okigbo's search for spiritual roots comes after a sense of absence as the same force drives Marechera in his own journey.

Peter Faulkner's remarks on mythic invention through modernists' works are helpful to see how myth can cover this absence:

> The use of myth is one way in which the modernist writer has felt to give coherence to his work, the myths often being the most general kind, concerned with death and regeneration, the cycle of nature, the order of seasons, though sometimes, as in the case of Ulysses, more specifically literary (Faulkner, 18).

Tanure Ojaide, in his book *Ordering the African Imagination*, considers myth as a means of expression for African writers. He underscores the role of persona in forms of myth making: "In African literature, especially in poetry, writers have assumed the personae of the myth-maker, town-

crier, pilgrim, wanderer, quester, warrior, scribe, and others. Okigbo saw himself as a creator of myths, as also a prophet who warns with his iron bell" (74).

Engaging with the mythic elements in poetry gives Okigbo space to cover the sense of a void. While for Okigbo spirituality is the only way to associate himself to the discovery of the modernist self, Marechera does not credit myth or spiritual elements in his poetry.

Marechera seems to lament the loss of spiritual sense in his poem "Emptied Hearts". The poem starts with a very striking observation that identify the persona's position, "No drums underline my singing/Neither ululation".

Drums and ululations do not accompany his poetry as the persona addresses the harshness and senseless face of life to overcome.

> Tugged and fished into gasping Air
> Where arias concuss and truncheons educate
> And books destroy the eyes
> And machines through flesh run amok
> When emptied hearts are dredged from the watery lanterns

The poem is also a critique of modern life and its brutal images that have no space for spirituality. The critical tone of the poem increases when the persona talks of those who are educated.

> Knowing did not carry any significance;
> But spread the clap,
> set on fire the derelict minds of shantytown;
> politicians screwed the menace
> that curdled the spunk of negritude.

These lines are strongest rebuttal of colonial ideology which imposes its rule through the knowledge system. The poem often refers to "void of self" along with gloomy images, "With nothing to lose but the precious void of self". The persona as a shadowy figure fails to resolve the

emptiness when he observes: “My dreams are derelict lives”, or, “I dream a terror dreamless, a darkness shadowless”.

In the same vein, Okigbo’s poem “On The New Year” invokes a sense of void. The word “void” appears three times in the poem. It describes the transition from the old year to the new year by recalling a Christmas carol. The poem reflects the persona’s state of ambiguity in search of his own roots. In the ordinary cycle of time, everything seems to work properly but later transforms into the void: “And the age rolls on like a wind glassed flood,/And the pilgrimage to the cross is the void.” The poem is replete with the Christian images such as ‘cross’, pilgrimage’, ‘missal’, and ‘Christ’. As a churchgoer, the persona loses his hope for life and searching for the roots.

> The roots are nowhere
> There are no roots here
> Probe if you may
> From now until doomsday

A romantic despair and hopelessness are manifested through these lines. The persona urges contemplation on faith and his own people by posing, “We have to think of ourselves as forever/Soaring and sinking like dead leaves blown by a gust”.

The poem proposes such a mourning of nation which has been “floating choicelessly” and “Old desires and new born hopes like bubbles burst/Into nothing—blown to the place of fear/o the cross in the void/”. Okigbo situates the persona between the old and the new which is blurred with images of fear.

Such indeterminacy preoccupies the early poems of Okigbo. For instance, “Lament Of The Flutes” is presented with ambiguity as the persona’s way of seeing the world. It bears a sense of traditional form and mourns rural life through memories. The persona intends to reveal the idea to venture into a spiritual quest towards his own roots.

> Where are the Maytime flowers,
> Where the roses? What will the
> Watermaid bring at sundown,

a garland? A handful of tears?

There is an implication manifested in the lines inviting the "runaway" persona to encounter his own ties. He tries to balance between the old and the new. The poem is accompanied by two flutes. By lamenting flutes, Okigbo creates the link between himself and traditional way of seeing.

Sing to the rustic flute:
Sing a new note …

These are confirmations of the persona's tendency towards his native roots as he is invoked by images like the rustic flute, night birds, woodnymphs, wind, pine, Watermaid and Idoto as river goddess.

We follow the wind to the fields
Brushing grass leafblade and corn

Wind is a guide here to take a seeker through the way, then everything becomes talkative. The lament is a strong invocation of spirits:

We hear them, the talkative pines,
And nightbirds and woodnymphs afar off …

But the persona of the poem is not fully attached to the spiritual call. He is undecided yet to undertake such a journey:

Shall I answer their call,
creep on my underself
out of my snug hole, out of my shell
to the rocks and the fringe for cleansing?
Shall I offer to Idoto
my sandhouse and bones,
then write no more on snow-patch?

The whole poem is tempted to be a ritual practice of "cleansing" and it can only be understood in the light of an animistic approach. Garuba's

explanatory remarks on animism are helpful to account for the animistic mode of communication between objects and spirits:

> Animism is often simply seen as belief in objects such as stones or trees or rivers for the simple reason that animist gods and spirits are located and embodied in objects: the objects are the physical and material manifestations of the gods and spirits. Instead of erecting graven images to symbolize the spiritual being, animist thought spiritualizes the object world, thereby giving the spirit a local habitation. Within the phenomenal world, nature and its objects are endowed with a spiritual life both simultaneous and coterminous with their natural properties. The objects thus acquire a social and spiritual meaning within the culture far in excess of their natural properties and their use value. Rivers, for example, not only become natural sources of water but are prized for various other reasons. The animist urge to reification may have been religious in origin, but the social and cultural meanings that become attached to the objects often break off from the purely religious and acquire an existence of their own as part of the general process of signification in society (Garuba, 2003:267).

The Goddess Idoto is tempting the persona and evoking the past but the persona's ambivalent position avoids any attempt of offering to Idoto. Similarly, the invocation of "Elegy Of The Wind" is an address to a deity. The wind, here, is also leading the persona to the myth, that of the gate of spiritual guidance:

> I will follow the wind to the clearing,
> And with muffled steps seemingly out of breath break
> the silence the myth of her gate

These lines reinforce the persona's commitment to the goddess Idoto. The poem is a reminiscence of childhood. He declares his allegiance to Idoto, saying: "I have lived the oracle dry on the cradle of a new generation". It marks a transition from the past and present-day of his time.

Ben Obumselu maps out the poem's referential world from classics to romantics to Negritude, and this fairly confirms the ways in which Okigbo's masterly invocation is melted into his own experiences. As

Okigbo does not choose the title at random, we should carefully read the vocabulary of the poem. Obumselu observes:

> The title of the poem should not be taken lightly. It is the key to the meaning. The wind, in Igbo language ikuku or ufele, is a symbol of moral unreliability. … Christopher Okigbo means to inform the reader by his choice of a title for this poem that "elegy of the Wind" is a poem about himself. He embraces the stereotype of the untamed heart meaning to exploit the ambiguities of a symbol that stands also for the breath of heaven and is the harbinger of fructifying rain (13).

As Obumselu mentions, the poem reflects poet's own experience. Since the wind stands for "moral unreliability" in Igbo tradition, the wind cannot be a guide for his "divination" from this perspective. With its negative connotation, wind refers to instability in the self, especially when the persona says: "And like motion into stillness is my divine rejoicing -/ The man embodies the child/The child embodies the man./

The poem is a reminiscence of childhood. The narrator recalls his circumcision during the initiation as "the song of innocence" by brutalizing the ritual accompanied by the chief priest's enchantment.

On Okigbo's ritual imagery, Heywood's remarks are worth quoting: "Ritual and oracular utterance is as much a part of the living oral heritage of the African poet as are folktales, proverbs, and mocking songs, and is woven into the living texture of experience which he shares with his Community" (48).

The persona invokes the wind to take him to "wider waters". There is a fear rooted in the self: "The child in me trembles before the high shelf on the wall,/The man in me shrinks before the narrow neck of calabash/". It also marks a transition phase of coming of age.

The poem ends with a pessimistic note:

> And the chant, already all wings, follows,
> In its ivory circuit behind the thunder clouds,
> The slick route of the feathered serpent.

These lines show that there are uncertainties and difficulties to tackle on the way. Unlike Okigbo, in Marechera's "Neither Innocence Nor Experience" the persona bemoans his hardship of childhood. The persona questions his own identity asking: "Where I am? Who are these? No sooner arrived/Than I am washed, swaddled, offered swollen breasts./What a world for defenceless child!"

For Marechera, there is no space for innocence as a child is processed into mechanism of the life. He reflects on childhood through "injustices":

> Sit me at school desk, propel me to office desk
> Till in utter bewilderment I surrender, bite the bit,
> And haul me along to the cold anonymous Out There.
> What a world for a defenceless youth!

Also, elsewhere Marechera's persona reminds us of the loss of childhood, since it "drowned never to rise" (From My Time to Know); here, the poem leads us to oblivion.

Images in Marechera's poetry seem to be scattered and very much disconnected. This creates an impossibility of any concrete representation for the readers to reflect on poetic imagination. In his poem, "My Arms Vanished Mountains", the persona tries to overcome the loss of his father who becomes an "irresistible presence" inside the self.

> How to achieve unthinkingly pure oblivion
> Drinking down several glasses of bitterness
> Of loss
> Of how your going announced like penetration
> Your irresistible urgent dreadful, dreadful presence
> In my blood.

There is no remedy for such loss, and it seems incurable. The persona cannot escape this "dreadful presence", the loss becomes a melancholic space of the self as "pure oblivion."

3.3. Centrality of Agency

Both Marechera and Okigbo use laments to situate themselves as modernist agents, as well as their engagement with modernist poets. Laments serve to preserve correspondence between both poets and other poets. Since laments reflect pure mourning, Marechera and Okigbo write poetry in tribute to Euromodernist poets to constitute their own view. Okigbo's "Lament Of The Mask" and Marechera's "The Poems Semantics" and "To Langston Hughes" are striking examples to understand their strategic positionality.

"The Poems Semantics" is attributed to German symbolist and modernist poet Rainer Maria Rilke. This poem reassures Marechera's commitment to Rilke's poetry as a source of his own inspiration.

> Not the tree but the space (within
> The eye) which contains the tree; the retina's
> All-encircling trajectory when I see
> Not the tree
> But the poem of the tree

Taking Rilke as inspiration, Marechera associates the poetic engagement with holiness.

> The hallow vibration cast a brilliant green
> On the aura of all I touched ---

This lament demonstrates the literary appreciation for Rilke, while reflective of Marechera's difference from him.

In "To Langston Hughes", Marechera connects himself with the central figure of Harlem Renaissance, poet Hughes. By entitling the poem Langston Hughes, Marechera manifests the direct connection between the two.

It is very rare for Marechera to link himself with someone who clearly struggled for and contributed to the literature on Black affirmation. The following lines illuminate the common experience between them when the persona positions himself along with the Harlemite poet.

> You and I on the pillar leaning
> Hieroglyphics of life and death

When the eye blinks
When the belly politely rumbles

Let me in, Spirit
Nothing out here but darkness
And frantic images
Let me out, body
Nothing here but darkness
And frantic images

Marechera's distinction between Spirit and body refers to the Harlem Renaissance's gloomy images associated with darkness. The persona seeks refuge in spirit because the Black body was socially dead in the times of colonial America and its aftermath. Since the body is doomed to be invisible, it is not welcomed at all. The poem is dominated by agony and bitterness.

The river swallowed whole
My crocodile tears
The reed bank fluted tall
The tiny song of distant weirs

This stanza speaks to Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and engages the debate reversing the romanticized idea of Africa. It is worth quoting the whole poem to make sense of Marechera's critical note:

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Hughes seems to trace the history of the unseen/oppressed soul of the Negro to the ancient times. The Negro subject is created as geographical imagination through rivers such as the Euphrates, the Congo, the Nile and Mississippi. The Black soul is likened to rivers which are flowing all the time, “My soul has grown deep like the rivers”. The persona presents himself/herself as a historical subject when he speaks from a point of experience: “I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins”. Rivers are the main sources through which a history of oppression as well as Blacks people’s contribution to the world history is shown.
Marechera’s critique is a sort of correction to the idea of the invention of Africa which was a predominant theme in Harlem and the Negritude poets. The poem ends with a question:

O! how could the juddering ecstasy so encompass
In a single eye the overpowering perfume of centuries
Long since disappeared

Here, such an ecstasy at finding himself in the realm of loss does not console the self.

“Lament of The Masks” was written in commemoration of the W. B. Yeats centenary. It consolidates Okigbo’s poetic commitment to Yeats’s oeuvre. It appears like anti-elegiac form (to use Ramazani’s term) praising Yeats’s influence over poets, especially Okigbo.
On Okigbo’s response to death, D. S. Izevbaye says there are “two kinds of response to death-the probing of its nature and the attempt to master the grief of death-influence the imagery and the form of Okigbo's poetry. The subject of dead produces two basic forms in his poetry: the lament

for the dead, and the poem that has its setting in the land of the dead." (44).

This lament falls under the second category since it does not deal with the death itself, instead it is presented with a portrait of the poet as hero. When the persona addresses Yeats as "Waggoner of the great Dawn" and "Hunter of elephants", the persona keeps calling him by his praise-names:

> How many beacon flames
> Can ever challenge the sun?
>
> Water of baptism,
> Ladder to ethereal ivory tower-
>
> Ten thousand rivers
> Can never challenge the sea.
>
> Thunder above the earth,
> Sacrifice too huge for the vulture—
>
> Hunter of elephants,
> Earth tremor upon the land—

Omolara Leslie draws on an important aspect of the poem; the adaptation of form of Yoruba praise song, *oriki*. He argues that "Lament combines the direct address and the naming of the deeds of hero, typical of the praise song with the use of special symbolism, "the White elephant"" (47).

> THEY THOUGHT you would stop pursuing the white elephant
> They thought you would stop pursuing the white elephant
> But you pursued the white elephant without turning back
> You who chained the white elephant with your magic flute

White elephant seems to be a poetic inspiration to follow in search of poet's own voice. It is tempted by a poetic vision which is associated with a traditional instrument, "magic flute".

As Ramazani says, Okigbo "reterritorializes Yeats, Africanizing him as an elephant hunter, his masks as ritual objects, while deterritorializing the praise song, centering it on a European subject." (Ramazani, 2009:103).

The lament invokes Yeats's strong affiliation to his Irishness & Irish mythology, as well as his persistent and distinctive voice in the modernist sense which appeals to Okigbo. Yeats is depicted as a heroic figure emasculating the form of oppression over Irishness. By doing this, Okigbo ensures the continuity of Yeats's poetic vision through his own voice. Yeats's Irishness appears as an "iron-mask" to acknowledge his determination to challenge the hegemonic discourse of Englishness. "Lament Of The Mask" is Okigbo's appreciation of Yeats's strategic positioning and the poem becomes an important part of Okigbo's own strategy as well, since the persona is "the arch-priest".

> Unlike accusing tones that issue forth javelins –
> Bring, O Poet,
> Panegyrics for the arch-priest of the sanctuary …

These lines result from Okigbo's affiliation and commitment to Yeats. Okigbo's "Havensgate", the first section of *Labyrinths,* and Marechera's "Pledging My Soul" become very characteristic of poetic positionality as well as centrality in making a modernist self. Both poets pay homage to their own sources which are dear to them.

In "Pledging my Soul", Marechera pledges allegiance to his home, Zimbabwe of the time when he was in exile. He humanizes the country in his body of boyhood. His country, his past, and his childhood are embodied in each other. It is presented as the reminiscent longing of a boy:

> When I was a boy
> I climbed onto your granite breasts
> smooth and round
> I trailed my body
> from the small of your back
> to your yielding neck
> the cup of your breasts
> was my pillow
> the rivers of your tears
> drowned me down in your depths
> and the smooth plain of your flat belly
> yielded to mine
> I was yours

And you were mine

In the first section of the poem, the speaker recalls his youth back home. It reflects the feeling and emotions spilled over from his remembering, ending on a testimonial note: "I am yours/and you are mine".
The second section focuses on a man who has been away from his homeland and is still longing for his own origin:

Now a man
in exile from the warmth of your arms
and the milk of your teeth
the breath of your secret whispers in my ears
shall I not stride back to you with haste
rout all my enemies and bind the wicked husbandmen
Shall I not kneel to kiss the grains of your sand
to rise naked before you --- a bowl of incense?
and the smoke of my nakedness shall be
an offering to you
pledging my soul.

Born in colonial Rhodesia in 1952, Marechera went to several mission schools before entering the University of Rhodesia to study English in 1972. He was expelled from the university for his involvement in student demonstrations against the colonial government led by Ian Smith. In 1976, Marechera got awarded a scholarship to pursue his studies at New College, Oxford. Even though he failed to complete his studies, he was involved in writing, producing stories, poems and novels until his return to Zimbabwe after its independence in 1982.
To return to the poem after this brief account of Marechera, the persona reflects the poet's own experiences of dislocation. Marechera seems to claim his own body through his homeland. It is not simply a question of land but a total dispossession or alienation created by the colonial regime. Living in exile, the persona feels obliged to attach himself to his own country. "Shall I not stride back to you with haste/rout all my enemies and bind the wicked husbandmen." He wishes to rout out the enemies of his home and punish "the wicked husbandmen", namely colonial administrators like Ian Smith and his surroundings.

Then, the persona certainly offers his own body, prostrating himself in front of the land. He invokes by ritualising an offer in a way like sacrificing himself: "Shall I not kneel to kiss the grains of your sand/to rise naked before you --- a bowl of incense?"
He is barefoot like Okigbo when he is offering himself to the goddess Idoto. This is a totally spiritual practice in which Marechera is deeply involved. By pledging his soul, he also pledges the strongest allegiance to his mother as a spiritual guide. It seems the only way to come to terms with the loss is mourning, whether material or abstract.

Apart from "Four Canzones", *Havensgate* is the first collection of Okigbo that draws attention to his own stylistic visionary. *Havensgate* consists of five movements: The Passage, Initiations, Watermaid, Lustra and Newcomer respectively.

The Passage begins with the moment that Okigbo's persona feels attached to his own roots. Here is often-quoted lines to reflect on Okigbo's intention toward a poetic innovation:

> BEFORE YOU, mother Idoto,
> naked I stand:
> before your watery presence,
> a prodigal
>
> leaning on an oilbean,
> lost in your legend.
>
> Under your power wait I
> on barefoot,
> watchman for the watchword
> at *Heavensgate*;

The very first lines, ''BEFORE YOU, mother Idoto'' introduces a situation of the self, an interior space filled out only in absence, through a creeping

void that suggests a melancholy of abandonment: calling himself "a prodigal" leaning on the oilbean tree without knowing the existence of the river goddess Idoto.

The prodigal is barefoot waiting for the invitation on the verge of falling into an abyss of darkness:

> out of the depths my cry:
> give ear and hearken
>
> DARK WATERS of the beginning.

From the "BEFORE YOU" of the first line, the passage moves, introducing the movement of imagination and language, the rhetoric of the quest for spirituality through the self.

Like Marechera's persona, here also the persona calls for mourning a mother to fulfil his ritual performance:

> Me to the orangery
> solitude invites,
> a wagtail, to tell
> the tangled-wood-tale;
> a sunbird, to mourn
> a mother, on a spray.

The long poem *Havensgate* invokes the sense of loss in the search for spiritual fulfilment. When the persona declares his loneliness, he certainly hopes to attract the goddess's sensibility:

> AND I WHO am here abandoned
>
> count the stand by wavelash abandoned,
> count her blessing, my white queen,
> …
> So I who count in my island the moments,
> count the hour which will bring
>
> my lost queen with angels' ash in the wind.

The persona is depicted in despair between his desire to reach and the absence to handle. The poem is replete with images of nature, animal, religion and spirituality which are interwoven in the poetic structure.

Juxtaposing different imageries enables Okigbo to explore the ways of looking as well as locating the modernist self.

Regarding Okigbo's poetic position, Ramazani situates him as a leading poet of modernist strategy:

> With its deep formal and allusive memory, lyric both locates and dislocates the speaker. Even as he elects a native return, he superimposes the language of monotheistic prayer on Igbo polytheism, redeploys Latinate syntactic inversions, and Africanizes the modernist concept of poetry as a personal verbal rite. A priestly offering to a local goddess, the sequence is also, according to Okigbo's introductory comments, an Orphic exploration of the poetic creativity that results, implicitly, in the very poem we read (Ramazani, 2009: 5).

There is a strong vocation of "I" as the persona in the last section of Havensgate, which is entitled "Newcomer". This presence of agency becomes dominant at the end of the poem:

> I am standing above the noontide,
> with head above it;
> Under my feet float the waters
> Tide blows them under …

The persona attempts to invoke the spiritual guide, that of Idoto, and deploying strategic position through watery images:

> Listening to the laughter of waters
> That do not know why:
>
> Listening to incense --

As modernist poets, Okigbo and Marechera create a distinct syntax engaging modern poetic tools and adapting the traditional form and themes. Since they transmit their observation of nature, spiritual and religious life, images are conveyed through the modernist perspectives.

In this chapter, I discussed the relations between positionality and modernist self in the poetry of Okigbo and Marechera. I've look at the strategies that Okigbo and Marechera employ to enact a modernist self through act of mourning. I tried to show how both poets engage the spirituality to find out their poetic way. The absence of spirituality leads Okigbo’s search for spiritual roots as the same force drives Marechera to very personal odyssey. I also argued both Marechera and Okigbo uses laments to engage Euromodernism, by doing so, they are able to constitute a passage to locate them at the center of modernist poetry.

CHAPTER FOUR
ENIGMATIC PHASE OF PAST AND PRESENT

In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which Okigbo and Marechera deal with the past as present, and how the past becomes the main figure in constituting the modern self in modernist poetry. As the past in the postcolonial poetry never entails a pure essence, it has to be reconstructed through poetry.

The idea of the past has become predominant in postcolonial literature where previously, the African past had been silenced, oppressed and untold for centuries. The past had to be recovered and renewed in very African terms to counter the colonial system. Achebe, in his famous article on Conrad, refers to the untold past as follows:

> I am talking about a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered *untold agonies and atrocities in the past* and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question (qtd. in McHale, 152). (Italics are mine)

In his presentation at the Conference of the Historical Association of Kenya in Nairobi (1968), Ngugi refers to the past as an experience, "I want to talk about the past as a way of talking about the present." He continues to state:

> Here I want to argue that what has been—evolution of human culture through the ages, society in motion through the time and space- is of great import to the poet and the novelist. for what has been, especially for the vast majority of submerged, exploited masses in Africa, Asia and Black America is intimately bound up with what might be: our vision of the future, of diverse possibilities of life

> and human potential, has roots in our experiences of the past (quoted in Okpewho, 156).

To clarify the idea of the past and its relations to loss, we should refer to Dominick LaCapra's remarks on the distinction between loss and absence. He argues that when loss transforms into absence, it creates "the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia" (698). He further notes that it may even bear witness to a striking traumatic situation:

> To blur the distinction between, or to conflate, absence and loss may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the post- traumatic, which create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling. The very conflation attests to the way one remains possessed or haunted by the past, whose ghosts and shrouds resist distinctions (such as that between absence and loss). Indeed, in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realize one is living in the here and now with future possibilities (LaCapra, 699).

For him, the historical past is the scene of loss to be narrated or transformed in the present and future. "The past is misperceived in terms of sheer absence or utter annihilation. Something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or revenant" (LaCapra, 699).

He states that loss, in contrast to absence, is based on a historical level and particular events.

> Some losses may be traumatic while others are not, and there are variations in the intensity or devastating impact of trauma. .. When absence and loss are conflated, melancholic paralysis or manic agitation may set in, and the significance or force of particular historical losses (for example, those of apartheid or the Shoah) may be obfuscated or rashly generalized (LaCapra, 712).

The arguments above might help me articulate the past clearly in the poetry. LaCapra's remarks might foreground the sense of the past and the responses to that. In the poetic lens of Okigbo and Marechera, the past is not welcomed as it keeps haunting the poetic self by destructing the mindsets. The past is provoking the present, deferring the unification of body and self. The past is contained inside the poetic body that cannot be avoided anymore.

Unlike Romantics, the idea of the past prevailing in the present does not provide a pure nostalgia but space to challenge it, because the past is embedded in colonial suppression over the modern subjects. Since it is associated with colonial formations and domestication of people, Christian ideology takes over the control of self.

The past is somehow an irreconcilable, provocative and pervasive space which creates a double consciousness. For Okigbo, it is spiritual to counter the past through the mourning process. In Marechera, it is never appealing and identifiable but a site of melancholy and obstacles.

For the African, the past is marred by colonial discourse and it needs to be excavated via binaries like spirituality and Christianity. The sense of past and present which foregrounds the poetry of Okigbo and Marechera seems irreconcilable even though they play a central part.

Since the past is not a pure entity due to its obscure character, it creates a sort of melancholy to uncover and excavate the loss. To get rid of the obstacles, poets have to claim their own past by dispossessing or distracting the colonial discourse embedded in the past. In Garuba's terms, it is totally "reclaiming cognitive and epistemological ownership of the land" (Garuba, 2017: 210) and their own past. The African past is imbricated with the Western educational system and Christianity.

For Okigbo, the past is not something to discover, it is an actual and dynamic force through which he invokes his own poetic voice as well as personality. But in Marechera, the past is charged as cite of violence. His poetry presents an impossibility of recognition of the past as it contains traumatic and brutal imagery.

Seeing colonialism as "regime of alienation", Garuba argues that it separated the African self from the natural world and the social order.

> By introducing a new order of things that destabilized the continuity of tradition, colonialism in effect introduced a regime of alienation on the people. In the literature, this alienation was not only portrayed as epistemological, in the sense of the ways people understand and orient themselves to the world, but also spatialized, in terms of the division between the rural and the urban. (Garuba, 2008:180).

Modern African poets, from the outset, had to deal with this question of alienation imposed on the self. The reactions to the estrangement vary from one poet to another. The more important of these are the mechanisms of the colonial discursive system that construct its subjects through Christianity, which also creates a dialectical play of oppositions between the colonizers and the others.

Because Christianity mainly targeted the ethical ground of indigenous culture, it functioned as a powerful device to domesticate the African people and their indigenous cultural practices through the process of alienation.

Okigbo and Marechera, like other African modern writers, began to contest the baggage of alienation imposed by the colonial system. To tackle this alienated self, they began to grapple with the backdrop of the colonial system. Okigbo has to resurrect the indigenous culture and spirituality. In LaCapra's sense, Okigbo seeks for spiritual guidance to

cover "the absence" as a void in the self. This absence is the concrete past which is double discursive and opposite in both systems; indigenous and Western.

In Marechera's poetry, the past cannot be recovered as it appears as a traumatic space in the poetic self. The collected poems of Marechera, *Cemetery of Mind,* comprises of nine parts. Each part can be read independently even though they are reflected in similar consciousness. In this chapter, I will read the poems collected under the title of "Throne of Bayonets" and "My Arms Vanished Mountains".

The poetry reflects on the transformation of colonial subjects to postcolonial and modernist subjects by warding off the colonial impact embedded in the body. *Labyrinths* shows Okigbo's ritual and literary quest through four movements, *Havensgate*, *Limits*, *Siren Limits* and *Distance*. All four sequences have multiple sections each. *Havensgate* is considered as Okigbo's declaration of his return to his own past. But this return does not suggest a pure and safe journey. It aims to fill the void self, the absence. It also privileges the spiritual over religion from the outset. The idea of return has to challenge the modern discursive system, which is embedded in a colonial education and religious system.

One should not forget that both Okigbo and Marechera are subjects of colonial and postcolonial regimes, in other words, modern subjects. Marechera's poetry invokes images of colonial brutality through self-experiences which project acute awareness. In "Fragments", when the persona associates' blackness with death, he is well aware that there is space or voice for black people in the modern colonial time.

the first darkness is dead
the night walks now under the trees
with solemn step shrouded by a death-song
even now strides the streets

and they are dead
their shadow-self looks down
that fortified peak of ancient rock
dead to their childhood
dead to their manhood

Nhamo Mhiripiri's reading suggests that these dark and shadowy images illustrate the situation of black people in colonial Rhodesia as he articulates, "Black people are at first lost, alienated and schizophrenic" (153). These lines suggest an invisible aspect of black life. Black people are considered 'socially dead' in the colonial regimes, for their past embodies such a loss, symbolized as a "fortified peak of ancient rock," that it could only be looked down upon by the shadowy persona. "The first darkness is dead" echoes Okigbo's "DARK WATERS of the beginning" in *Havensgate,* and the gloomy images of darkness invoke the civilizing mission's insidious character.

The persona laments the unwritten history of the past, the masks, and proverbs and poems:

the black mask knotted over a dead cigarette
mask of summer proverbs and seasonal poems
never written, but scattered over seven hills
like broken metal
the scrap-iron of a lost empire

The lost empire is the ancient African kingdom of Zimbabwe, and its capital city, Great Zimbabwe, which has been buried in history. The presence of the ancient city is lost to all generations and cannot be recovered. The reminiscences of the past are not seen through the present time, only ruins as "the scrap-iron" reminds us of the untold past.

The persona jumps from the past to present time, the violent temperament of the colonial time. Since the past is destroyed, the presence of the self hardly locates himself through "the dazed schizophrenia of the time". There is no way to reconcile with the past. The

persona lives in vacillation between the idea of the past and now. This dilemma reinforces the desolation when the poet invokes the brutal imagery of colonialism:

> in the last days of summer
> the sun broke into sunset
> and I heard the sudden whine
> of a bullet
> ricocheting

The traumatic past of the persona keeps haunting and distracting the self. The images of a summer day is interrupted by the random violence of daily life. "The Liberty" ironically depicts the brutal side of colonial power as well as the resistance against it. For Marechera, there cannot be any space for liberation since it is ideologically engaged. The following lines demonstrate the clash between the colonial power and the resistance movement:

> two men
> locked in strenuous struggle
> of violence
> two men now killers
> settling the difference of their separate
> ideologies, but each now alone
> bent on his prey

Because ideologies are regulated through a modern discursive system which is dominated by the colonial power, even if it springs from different sources, the struggle becomes involved "in a desperate dance of death". The brutal picture of daily life depicted in the poetry turns into despair that characterizes the persona's inclination in the middle of explosions. The dichotomy is harshly reflected through the self which later becomes melancholic.

> the waters unleashed their scything
> flood powers
> wild scattering of primeval beasts

rose into hoof-pounded
crescendo, as ---
the moment the sky cried out in a thrombosis
of lightening ---
the moment of second explosion
lit up white in a heave of stones
and bodies ---
resounding through the arrested moment
of time
  in a desperate dance of death ---

The construction of racial and ideological difference in this poem might be the essential ground for the conception of a homogeneous colonial subjectivity which has been denied and deferred by Marechera. Such conflicts convey the degree of violence involved in the imagination of the poet. The persistent images of the past assure that it is never really pure and uniform.

Similarly, Okigbo's poetry does not provide any purity in the past, although the poet himself uses the poetry to make the past ever-present. The absence in the self is filled with spiritual agony in a true sense. Okigbo's journey of spirituality proves that Okigbo, unlike Marechera, transforms the agony of the past by creating his own past, and such replacement helps him in healing and recovering from the alienated past. The trauma of past leads Okigbo to feel obliged to spiritual roots as a means to overcome the impositions of modernity, that is, of Western and Christian values.

First of all, Okigbo's personas speak of a spiritual and imaginative state in order to ward off the dominant colonial discourse that detained his questing for his own culture. Okigbo himself was supposed to assume the role of chief priest of goddess Idoto, which descended to him by incarnation. In one of his interviews, he clearly states his own inclination toward a deity Idoto:

> I am believed to be a reincarnation of my maternal grand- father, who used to be priest of the shrine Ajani, where Idoto, the river goddess is worshipped. This goddess is the earth mother, and also the mother of the whole family … when I was born … I should carry on his duties. And although someone else had to perform these duties,. This other person was only a regent. And in 1958, when I started taking poetry very seriously, it was as though I had felt a sudden call to begin performing my full functions, as chief priest of Idoto (qtd. in Nwaegbe, 103).

Okigbo even considers his own creative and poetic vision as part of performing spiritual duty. He goes on to say in the same interview, "My creative activity is in fact one way of performing those functions in a different manner. Every time I write a poem, I am in fact offering a sacrifice. My *Havensgate* is a huge sacrifice" (qtd. in Esonwanne 59). This approach provides an ideal template that is based on the idea of sacrifice and ritual cleansing through poetry. By associating poetry with a religious-like performance, Okigbo does not consider that "the past is a lost, lost past, too remote, too foreign to be relevant for the reinforcement of what must now be written" (Udoeyop, 1973: 11).

As Romanus Egudu puts it, "one of the worst effects of colonialism and colonial evangelization in West Africa is the suppression of the indigenous West African culture in general, and the indigenous religious worship in particular" (Egudu, 1973:14). Christian missionaries played a central part in constructing the colonial subject in a way that led to estrangement from indigenous culture.

The conflict between the indigenous culture and Christian practices in Okigbo's poetry seems to be a predominant theme. This conflict creates an ambivalence inside the poetic self. Since Okigbo grew up living a religious environment as a Catholic, it was not easy to get rid of the influences and practices as we shall trace through his journey.

Okigbo's epiphanic moment realizing his abandonment to the native culture crystalized in the following lines:

Me to the orangery
Solitude invites,
A wagtail, to tell
The tangled-wood-tale
A sunbird, to mourn
A mother on a spray

The persona feels emotionally secluded and isolated, which is why mourning the mother Idoto helps him through this agony. As Egudu points out, the poet is actually mourning the indigenous culture that had been suppressed by the Christian religion (15).

The persona of the poem is associated with "wagtail", "young bird" and "sunbird" which later becomes a symbol of indigenous culture. *Havensgate* is a sequence of conflict, or confrontation between Christianity and spirituality, namely indigenous practices of religion, for Okigbo had to come to terms with such alienation coming from Christianity in order to excavate the past to make it ever-present.

In *Havensgate*, Okigbo creates a consciousness that allows him to see a spiritual path through alienated forces. We are presented with the illusion-making power of Christianity to understand the scale of oppression over the native culture. *Havensgate* is an intense endeavor to ally the poetry with spirituality, and by doing so, Okigbo manages to overcome the foreign forces over the self.

In "The Passage", the persona invokes dark images through Christianity with a biblical note: "DARK WATERS of the beginning." The following lines create a dichotomy between the native and Christian values, which is also prevailing through the poem:

> Rainbow on far side, arched like a boa bent to kill,
> foreshadows the rain that is dreamed of.

N. J. Udoeyop points to a double vision of the passage that is "visual and state of the mind" (103). The rainbow is a symbol which combines negative and positive connotations. In the positive sense, it is a Christian symbol of a covenant that there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth (Genesis 9/11). At the same time, "it is associated with the yawning of the boa in some African mythology" (Udoeyop, 103).

From the very start, the combination of contrasting images generate an impossibility of reconciliation between the two. It shows that the modern discursive system cannot accommodate the native system, there seems to be no way to reunite them since their values are not compatible at all. In "Initiations", the persona recalls his own experiences of Catholic baptism. Okigbo's initiation into Christianity represents a painful process which he had gone through.

SCAR of the crucifix
over the breast,
by red blade inflicted
by red hot blade,
on right breast wiitnesseth

mystery which I, initiate,
received newly naked
upon waters of genesis
from Kepkanly,

elemental, united in vision
of present and future,
the pure line, whose innocence
denies inhibitions

At confluence of planes, the angle:
man loses man, loses vision;

so comes John the Baptist
with bowl of salt water
preaching the gambit:
life without sin, without

life; which accepted
way leads downward
down orthocenter
avoiding decisions

"Initiations" is considered the beginning of Okigbo's journey to his homeland. The images used for his initiation seem to be more violent and aggressive. "SCAR of the crucifix" inflicted "over the breast" suggests an everlasting image on Okigbo, which can be read as one of the "violent impositions of Christianity" (Ngara, 36).

Initiation changes the perception of life, destroys the innocence of the self, which is spirituality or a pure sense of life. Once initiated into Christianity, the persona can no longer be considered as innocent as he once was. The religion imposes its practices on the native people as a whole discursive formation from which one cannot escape. The experience of baptism for the persona is referred to as "scar of crucifix". That does not suggest a welcoming ceremony. The implications of these images demonstrate the critique of encountering the Christian belief system. As Emmanuel Ngara suggests, the line "orthocenter/avoiding decisions" refers to the dogmatism of the Catholic Church (36).
To avoid the destructive impact of Christianity, Okigbo has to challenge and debunk it through his imagination. But Okigbo does not part ways with Christianity until the end of his complete journey through *Distances*.

In the following movements, "Watermaid", "Lustra" and "Newcomer", the persona is determined to look for his own purification to be welcomed by the native goddess. Goddess Idoto is referred to as "watermaid" as well. The prodigal, persona traces the presence of the goddess.

EYE OPEN on the sea,
eyes open, of the prodigal;
upward to haven shoot
where stars will fall from

The persona tries to invoke the watermaid to reveal the secret he holds, one which he has told no one: "Secret I have planted into beachsand". The Idoto is called "my lioness", "maid of the salt-emptiness" and "my white queen".
The persona, feeling lonely and abandoned, cries out:

AND I who am abandoned,

count the sand by wavelash abandoned,
count her blessing, my white queen.

The persona longs for the encounter with the goddess, and he is engaged in an emotional atmosphere waiting for her response.

The stars have departed,
And I, where am I?

The persona is "fulfilling each moment in a /broken monody", as he is full of enthusiasm to declare his allegiance. The persona spends all the time mourning and tries to capture the moment of sacrifice.
The fourth section of *Havensgate*, "The Lustra", renders an important service for the persona's spiritual achievement. Various images of cleansing dominate the poem, such as eggs, hens, vegetable offerings and palm grove. It is a ritual performance of the persona.

It is striking to trace Okigbo's refinement of spiritual language; almost all the images associate with each other. That does not, however, mean the images work in harmony, as the poem accommodates Christian images as well.

So would I from my eye the mist
so would I
thro' moonmist to hilltop
there for cleansing

Here is a new laid egg

here a white hen at the midterm

The persona offers his sacrifice from the top of the hills. This poem marks the persona's willingness for purification. Cleansing is needed to be pure in order to be welcomed by the native goddess. "Eggs" and "hens" are to be sacrificed to the Igbo deity. While the persona celebrates his progress towards spirituality, a refrain in between reads: "Messiah will come again/After the argument in heaven/Messiah will come again". But this messianic call does not change protagonist's mind. No one pays heed to that call. He makes his vegetable offering to palm grove accompanied by "long-drums and cannons" to invoke the ascent of the spirit.

The last section of *Havensgate*, "Newcomer", actually celebrates a newborn child, Georgette who is Okigbo's niece. But the poem is not just a celebration, Okigbo transforms the reality of the birth into his own spiritual rebirth. As S. O. Anozie puts, "If "Watermaid" is the nemesis for the poet's lack of Purification, "Newcomer" is his meed, the return of a poetic state of grace owing to his purification" (3).

"Newcomer" starts by calling for prayer. "Time for worship". The poet's integration of Catholic images, and his own spirituality creates an ambivalence:

Mask over my face—

my own mask, not ancestral—I sing:
remembrance of calvary,
and age of innocence, which is of …

The persona here differentiates between Christian ideology and the holy cross. His comparison between the age of innocence and calvary is quite telling. These stanzas also represent hypocrisy in Christian discourse. Later, the persona's beseeching of Anna for protection reinforces this

dichotomy. “Anna of the panel oblongs, /protect me/from them fucking angels.”

The following lines also justify the poetic ambivalence as persona stands in betweenness:

> I AM standing above the noontide,
> Above the bridgehead,

For Okigbo, the sense of past should be rejuvenated through present time. Okigbo’s main objective, as we have seen through his poems so far, is to brand the past as new. For the past is not considered as lost and is very much to be reanimated.
While Okigbo illustrates his own project of the past through resurrection of spirituality, Marechera demonstrates the past as a loss which creates a melancholic state of mind and leads to traumatic consequences.

Marechera’s longish poem “Throne of Bayonets” captures the sense of depletion of the past and meaning. It illustrates the scene of fragmentation and despair along with a pervasive sense of absence and loneliness. “Throne of Bayonets” begins with a hard-hitting question: “Where to sit still/And slam the door/Against fear of tomorrow?” The poem provokes the persona’s imagination with the fear of future. He is hopeless and in despair.

> Brute black rain
> Pummels my brainpath
> Unleashes areas of despair
> In my once sunlit memory.

The persona relies on his “once sunlit memory” to unpack the damages of the past. For him, the memory only helps him discover “terror the totem of truth” with “wrecked hopes” and “battered souls”. Since his hopelessness is not dispelled, we are presented with an agonized self

through the poem. Unlike Okigbo, Marechera's connection with the past seems problematic and insoluble. The persona's cynical voice raises his dilemma between himself and the past.

> The shades of incarnated history
> Hums my song, hums all the wrong.

History and the past is also battered in many ways, "incarnated", and parted away from the present. No efforts are made to revive it, or to make it present. What is left are only destructive images of the remote past as the shades of past remind him. He notes: "When I look at Harare, my hair stands on end", for the city pictures all violent and brutal history. He recalls his painful childhood when he looks down at the city slums and squares. He somehow feels forced: "Mortality early and you are doomed/To forever walk alone."

> Lightening flashes, thunder hurls his
> Bolts:
> "No escape from the whips of Chance
> "Only escape to sit down and write."

The brutality comes forth from obscurity, and images of life experiences become a self-reflexive body that contains the fragments of the past which still haunts his mind. "Against the polished blackspread of sky/The scarcely visible moon/ And the satiated roar of waiting thunder.

The image of "thunder", which is a persistent and pervasive image in both Okigbo and Marechera, is the way in which violence or bad omens are presented. Okigbo's "Come Thunder" ends with: "And the secret thing in its heaving/Threatens with iron mask/The last lighted torch of the century …" But it is not always taken as a negative force in Okigbo.

Depression reflected in Marechera is seen in "Cracked mirror" because of his detachment from his surroundings. The sense of humanity disappears

when the persona turns to challenge the past and reflect it onto the future:

> Does there lurk design in Chance
> And in my place therein?
> Reasoning thus I came upon a legless fragment
> Of humanity, his toothless scowl
> An attempt to accommodate humanity
>
> A hot hungry landscape
> Has etched itself on the steelplate
> Of the future –

The poem invokes the characteristic images of nature in the home country. This invocation justifies the poet's longing for a natural landscape through his sunlit memory.

> That tumultuously waterless
> Victoria Falls
> Of writer after writer
> Hurled to the seething hell below
> I gave her the pure bloom of jacaranda
> The fiery ecstasy of flamelilies
> This continuous gnawing delight
> That now is nothing but painful memory

The reason why the poet is obsessed with the natural images but at the same time distracted by the colonial ornaments and Christian images is deeply tied to the past and ownership. Since the poet cannot claim ownership of his homeland, it creates another template transferring the claim of ownership. The poet-protagonist is represented as homeless and dispossessed in terms of land which also relates to some sort of belonging. In Marechera's case, memory does not help him to construct the past, the culture which he owns.

The loss of the past creates an agony through landscape and his lived experiences. The melancholic and romantic are well placed in the poetic self.

The following lines are from “My Arms Vanished Mountains” which could be read as a pastoral melancholy:

> Vanished mountains
> Morning’s landscape in my mind
> Undulant sprawling grasslands
> Steelwalls white-hot around her heart
> Would Antigone’s conscience flame-lick across the Zambezi gorge?

The past is associated with despair, and the personas of Marechera poems seem to be willingly destructed by the traumatic scene. The past is personified in “Dido in Despair” when the persona cries: “No broom can sweep away the dust/Of your departure.” Then, it continues as follows:

> Black sunlight, granitic water
> Flames encased in sheets of ice,
> My heart can only read in the dark,
> My footsteps are planted firmly on empty air,
> My eyes, seeking answers, peer backward into my brains.

We are presented with the darkened and gloomy natural images characterizing the persona’s melancholy and despair due to lack of the source, the past.

For Marechera, the only thing to claim is to manifest ownership of his poetry and writing. This poetic self appears frequently, almost like a leitmotiv of the poetry. “My name and voice introduce themselves: Poet”. Like Okigbo, Marechera also has to deal with colonial ideology through its systematic references, Christianity, and symbols which are erected across the country. The following lines from the third part of the poem reflect on the symbols of colonial power:

An empty plinth where Rhodes' statue
Stood. From the dreaded hours of darkness

My lunch is a bench in Cecil Square
A Gideon's Bible and the newspaper.

As Cecil Rhodes represents the ultimate colonial power, the images and names in his honor remain provoking the persona, and his statue is associated with harsh imagery, "dreaded hours of darkness." Marechera tries to frame out the colonial Harare by showing different aspects of life. The daily life experiences reflect "colonial tension and stress". Here is the picture of the church service he recalls:

And clangour of bells in the Anglican Cathedral
The mini-skirts and the flared trousers
The flashing teeth and generous handshakes
And hordes of Polaroid freelancers –
Are these the lights, the vanishing sights
And quite sunlit memories?

This reminiscence of churchgoing draws on the moment of joyfulness, as it is very rare in Marechera's life. But in Okigbo the service becomes part of his initiation into Christianity. Marechera, on the other hand, does not take it as intrusion into the self.

The dilemma of the past and present remains unsolved for Marechera. Because of the alienation, the cultural revivalism seems Greek to him. He reveals his very articulate sense of the past in the following lines from "My Arms Vanished Mountains":

The past
Which is so threatening
The past fills
All over again
Clean.

Even though the past is not renewable and threatening, it still tantalizes Marechera all the time in a way that he cannot avoid. In Okigbo, the past is to be re-embodied continually over and over via new forms.

Labyrinths' second movement, *Limits*, marks a significant cleansing in Okigbo's spiritual journey. *Limits* has two sections, "Siren Limits" and "Fragments of Deluge". "Siren Limits" starts with transformation of the persona as follows:

> SUDDENLY becoming talkative
> Like weaverbird

The persona is assimilated to a bird, a sunbird. After a long time waiting in between two worlds - Christianity and spirituality - the persona has decided to return to his own roots completely. As an alienated person, he has to undergo a cleansing process. As he has already made offering to the goddess Idoto, he has to perform ritual sacrifice before entering his own religion. He has to renounce his Christian values before submission to the river goddess. D. S. Izevbaye's comments on ritual sacrifice are worth quoting: "Ritual offering is necessary only because the poet hero has been a prodigal and is therefore technically a stranger requiring ritual cleansing before being readmitted into communion with his goddess" (10).

Once prodigal, Okigbo's myth seeker, is ready to pledge himself to the goddess in between sleep and waking to evoke inspiration:

> Between sleep and waking
> I hang up my egg-shells
> To you of palm grove,
> Upon whose bamboo towers

The persona declares his cleansing ritual to get admitted to into spirituality:

Queen of the damp half light,
I have had my cleansing
Emigrant with air-borne nose
The-he-goat-on-heat

As a novice, the persona has to be strengthened physically and spiritually. "Needing more roots/More sap to grow to the sunlight/ thirsting for sunlight."
Okigbo takes a rite of passage through labyrinths of divination into his poetic imagination. The poem is a clear manifestation of the poet-protagonist's or the persona's inclination towards a traditional deity.

Since Okigbo chooses the spiritual way to tackle the alienated self imposed by the colonial system, his poetry illustrates the most dramatic phase of colonial encounter as well.

The second sequence of *Limits*, "Fragments out of the Deluge" demonstrates the Western missionary's arrival on African soil. It is the sunbird, a prophetic eye of indigenous pantheon, who first announces the news of colonial invasion:

BUT THE sunbird repeats,
Over the oilbean shadows:

'A fleet of eagles,
over the oilbean shadows
Holds the square
under the curse of their breath.

The sunbird mostly refers to indigenous culture and represents an age of innocence, namely spirituality. When the eagles came, the first action they did was to kill the sunbird. They entered the forest and destroyed the twin-gods of the forest. The twin-gods referred to in the note are the tortoise and the python which are sacred to traditional

religion. This is exactly what happened after the Western colonizers arrived on African soil. This also shows the scale of the damage and the impact of Christian thought on natives and their cultures. After the forest was invaded by the foreigners, the gods were abandoned.
In the next stage, the reader is represented with reappearance of the sunbird.

> The sunbird sings again
> From the LIMITS of the dream;
> The sunbird sings again
> Where the caress does not reach

The sunbird reincarnates and sings again, and these lines metaphorically can be read as Okigbo's challenge to modern discourse to revive the cultural roots in the poetic self. Through the poetry, Okigbo reincarnates his spiritual ties with the past. The poetry of Okigbo evinces that the past can be reembodied continually, and modernist poetry connects this past to form a new sense of reality which debunks the dichotomies imposed through hegemonic discourse.

The fourth movement of the *Labyrinths* is called "Distances". The sequence is considered as a poem of "homecoming", as the poet himself says in the introduction. In R. N. Egudu's words: "In any event, "Distances" is essentially concerned with a spiritual journey from "foreign" Christ to native Idoto, a journey from the Christian theory of salvation effected after death to the indigenous state of purity and bliss attainable in life" (153).

From the first line of "Distances", the transition from Christ to the native pantheon is manifested:

> FROM FLESH into phantom on the horizonal stone
> I was the sole witness of my homecoming

The persona performs a pilgrimage to the water-goddess in the process of purification. This divination process requires repentance and salvation. Even though the persona is on his way home, he is still in doubt trying to figure out the changing perspective by reverting to them:

> IN THE scattered line of pilgrims
> bound for Shibboleth
> in my hand the crucifix
> the torn branch of censer

The crucifix as a central theme in Christianity becomes a recurrent symbol in Okigbo's journey. His juxtaposition of different images, mainly the Christian and Indigenous, does not allow us to avoid the complexity.

More importantly, Okigbo has to deconstruct the Christian salvation practices to establish the spiritual past in his body. The following lines show the absolute submission to the goddess:

> I have entered your bridal
> chamber, and lo,
>
> I was the sole witness of my homecoming

To summarize, in this chapter I have tried to trace the sense of past in the poetry of Okigbo and Marechera. Although both poets are very concerned about the past, they do not address it in the same way. The construction of the past does not serve the same purpose. In Okigbo's case, the past is an inevitable entity to hold forever, while Marechera sees the past through the traumatic imagination which blurs perception, turning the self into oblivion.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that Christopher Okigbo and Dambudzo Marechera adopted a particularly modernist style of poetry. Both poets enact a modernist subjectivity in order to witness their own experiences through the past and present. They create an ambiguous and complex poetic language to navigate and reflect around the self and outside world.

In the study, I worked to show how the mourning process becomes an instrumental way to help the poets transmit their lived experiences. This becomes a very essential part of constructing the modernist self. Thus, melancholy and mourning played a crucial role in constructing the self as an autonomous entity. To hold this entity, they had to encounter the drastic impact of colonial formations, that of the alienation.

Okigbo and Marechera had to get rid of the alienated self to prove their subjective agency in linguistic terms. It is important to note that the poets part ways in the process of coming to terms with the self-imposed alienation through the colonial and western cultural apparatus.

As subjects of colonialism, both Okigbo and Marechera sought to establish new links combining them with the mainstream Euromodernist movement along with their own spiritual roots. In the sense of a reconstruction of a

modernist self, the main predicament they have to challenge is the Western knowledge system which infiltrated into mindsets through colonial dominion.

Okigbo and Marechera enact a certain type of positionality strategy to claim their own poetic utterance. By invoking natural and spiritual images the poets demonstrate their affiliation to their roots. The process of mourning, here, becomes a passage through which the poets claims their strong allegiances to their roots. The sense of absence leads the poets to mourn their remote past or culture.

For Okigbo it is a spirituality that motivated him through a poetic journey engaged in literary and spiritual landscapes. Okigbo's quest for spiritual achievement locates him both globally and locally.

Unlike Okigbo, the lack of spirituality drives Marechera through his literary engagement and his land. Besides that, the dislocation of the self enables him to mourn the homeland instead of searching for a spiritual entity.

The sacrificing self is a practice that becomes a predominant figure in both poets' positionality in order to objectify the absence in general.

As shown in this study, the poets' relation with the past determines the dynamics of subjectivity. For the idea of the past is so tempting and tantalising in many ways. Okigbo embarks on a spiritual journey into the past to excavate and revive through the self. For Okigbo, the past is

contained in the present and renewable therefore it should be transmittable and retrievable.

Following Pound's slogan for modernist writing, "make it new," Okigbo creates a spiritual past with which to predict the present. His spiritual journey, which ends up with homecoming, marks not only Okigbo's commitment to his past, but also the past as a prevailing agent in present.

Both experiences of Okigbo and Marechera, as I have explained, illustrate the significance of different approaches to the past. As the past does not occupy a space inside Marechera's poetry, this creates a melancholy and ambiguity through imagination. Because of its traumatic character, the past becomes a loss which cannot be reconciled, communicated and even invented. It is an undefinable and irretrievable loss embedded in brutal and violent images.

This study therefore, using a modernist approach, suggests that both poets do

not look for validity of the past or reinventing the traditions at all. They felt obliged to transmit and translate the idea or images of past and present, whether they are combined or separate, into consciousness. Okigbo's poetry seems to be ritualizing the form of the past we encounter all the time, whereas Marechera prefers to traumatize the past into his self-consciousness.

This study raises many questions regarding modernist poetry in Africa. What remains unresolved, however, is a record and analysis of the contribution of modernist African poets. Besides their engagement with Euromodernism, what kind of subjectivity they create in terms of literary style?

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Akcay, Ahmet Sait. Interview with Harry Garuba on Modernist African Poetry (Unpublished Interview, November, 2019).

Amuta, Chidi. *Theory of African Literature: Implications for practical criticism*. ZED Books Ltd., 2017.

Anozie, Sunday Ogbonna. *Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric*. Africana Pub. Corp, 1972.

Anozie, S. O. "Okigbo's Heavensgate: a Study of Art as Ritual" In Nwoga, Donatus Ibe, ed. Critical Perspectives on Christopher Okigbo. Vol. 21. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1984.

Ashcroft, Bill. "Menippean Marechera." *Reading Marechera* (2013): 76-98.

Clewell, Tammy. *Mourning, modernism, postmodernism*. Springer, 2009.

Chennells, Anthony J., and Flora Veit-Wild, eds. *Emerging perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*. Africa World Press, 1999.

Deutsch, Jan-Georg, Peter Probst, and Heike Schmidt. *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate*. James Currey, 2002.

Eddie Tay, "Marechera, the Three-Poem-Artifact." In Grant Hamilton. Ed. *Reading Marechera*, James Currey, 2013:172-186.

Egudu, Romanus. "Defence of culture in the poetry of Christopher Okigbo." *African Literature Today* 6 (1973): 14-25.

Egudu, Romanus. "Ezra Pound in African Poetry: Christopher Okigbo." *Comparative Literature Studies* (1971): 143-154.

Esonwanne, Uzoma, ed. *Critical Essays on Christopher Okigbo*. Twayne Publishers, 2000.

Esty, Jed. *A shrinking island: Modernism and national culture in England*. Princeton University Press, 2009.

Egudu, Romanus. "Defence of Culture in the Poetry of Christopher Okigbo." *African Literature Today* 6 (1973): 14-25.

Emmanuel Ngara, *Ideology & Form in African Poetry*, J. Currey, 1990.

Eliot, Thomas S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Selected Essays." *London, itd: Faber and Faber* (1951).

Hamilton, Grant, ed. *Reading Marechera*. Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2013.

Faulkner, Peter. *Modernism (Routledge Revivals)*. Routledge, 2013.

Fraser, Robert. *West African poetry: A critical history*. Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Psychoanalytic Review (1913-1957)* 11 (1924): 77.

Garuba, Harry. "Landscape, the Environment, and Postcolonial Poetry." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry* (2017): 209-221.

Garuba, Harry. "Explorations in animist materialism: Notes on reading/writing African Literature, culture, and society." *Public culture* 15.2 (2003): 261-285.

Garuba, Harry. "No-Man's Land: Nuruddin Farah's Links and the Space of Postcolonial Alienation." *Literary Landscapes*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2008. 180-197.

Gikandi, Simon. "Preface: Modernism in the World." Modernism/modernity 13.3 (2006): 419-424.

Izevbaye, D. S. "Death and the Artist: An Appreciation of Okigbo's Poetry." *Research in African Literatures* 13.1 (1982): 44-52.

Izevbaye, Dan. "Living the myth: Revisiting Okigbo's art and commitment." *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 48.1 (2011).

Irele, Abiola, and Simon Gikandi, eds. *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Johnson, Barbara. *The critical difference: Essays in the contemporary rhetoric of reading*. JHU Press, 1985.

Jameson, Fredric. *The modernist papers*. Verso Books, 2016.

Klopper, Dirk. "The Outsider Within: Marginality as Symptom in Marechera's "Throne of Bayonets" In Chennells, Anthony J., and Flora Veit-Wild, eds. *Emerging perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*. Africa World Press, 1999.

Leslie, Omolara. "The Poetry of Christopher Okigbo: Its Evolution and Significance." *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 4.1 (1973).

Marechera, Dambudzo. *Cemetery of Mind: poems*. Africa World Press, 1992.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. "Postcolonial modernism." *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture* (2005): 551-557.

Ramazani, Jahan. "Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity." Modernism/modernity 13.3 (2006): 445-463.

McHale, Brian, ed. *Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Literatures in English*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Musvoto, Rangarirai Alfred. *Recasting History: Imagining and Mapping Out Identities in Some Zimbabwean Poetry*. Diss. University of Pretoria, 2010.

Nwakanma, Obi. *Christopher Okigbo, 1930-67: Thirsting for Sunlight*. Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2010.

Nwoga, Donatus Ibe, ed. *Critical Perspectives on Christopher Okigbo*. Vol. 21. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1984.

Mbembe, J-A., and Steven Rendall. "African modes of self-writing." *Public culture* 14.1 (2002): 239-273.

McLoughlin, T. O., "Resistance and Affirmation: Marechera's "My Arms Vanished Mountains." In Chennells, Anthony J., and Flora Veit-Wild, eds. *Emerging perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera.* Africa World Press, 1999.

Mhiripiri, Nhamo. "Danger! Stay Away From Meaningless Poetry" In Chennells, Anthony J., and Flora Veit-Wild, eds. *Emerging perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*. Africa World Press, 1999.

Nwaegbe, William Dikedi Onyebuchim. *Alienation and Literature:Discursive Maps in the West African Experience*. Xlibris Corporation, 2013.

Obumselu, Ben. "Cambridge House, Ibadan,1962–66: Politics and Poetics in Okigbo's Last Years." Research in African Literatures 41.2 (2010):1-18.

Ojaide, Tanure. *Ordering the African imagination*. Malthouse press, 2007.

Okigbo, Christopher. *Labyrinths*. Heinemann. (1971).

Okafor, Dubem. *The Dance of Death: Nigerian History and Christopher Okigbo's Poetry*. Africa World Press, 1998.

Okpewho, Isidore. *Myth in Africa*. CUP Archive, 1983.

Ojaide, Tanure. *Ordering the African imagination*. Malthouse press, 2007.

Onu, John Odo. "Ethnopoetic study of Igbo oral funeral poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu state, Nigeria." *Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow Volume 19: 6 June 2019 ISSN 1930-2940* (2017): 469.

Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Thien Madeleine. Okigbo’s Generation: A Conversation with Obi Nwakanma, *Brick*, 93, 2014.

Udoeyop, Nyong J. *Three Nigerian Poets: a critical study of the poetry of Soyinka, Clark, and Okigbo*. Ibadan University Press, 1973.

wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Something torn and new: An African renaissance*. Basic Civitas Books, 2009.